Media Monitor

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Humor Update Page 6

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Volume V Number 9 November 1991

The Postwar President

TV News Coverage of the Bush Administration 1989-1991

How does TV news cover the presidency? From January 1989 through September 1991, 6,281 news stories have dealt with the Bush administration on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts. As media attention turns toward Campaign '92, this issue of *Media Monitor* examines the administration's TV news profile, with special reference to the impact of the Persian Gulf crisis. This issue also updates our continuing study of political humor on late-night television talk shows.

Major findings:

■ **Postwar Prominence** George Bush's TV coverage is up 50 percent since the Persian Gulf crisis. *Page 2*

■ **War Dividend** Bush's press was two-to-one positive during the Gulf War but two-to-one negative since it ended. *Page 2*

■ **Out at Home** Evaluations of Bush's domestic policies are more than five-to one negative. *Page 5*

■ **Middling East Coverage** Even during the war, a majority of sources criticized Bush's Persian Gulf policies. *Page 4*

■ **Media Power** Bush's TV coverage accurately predicts changes in his poll ratings. *Page 5*

■ **Booby Prize** Since the Gulf crisis, Dan Quayle has replaced George Bush as the number one target of late night TV comedians. *Page 6*

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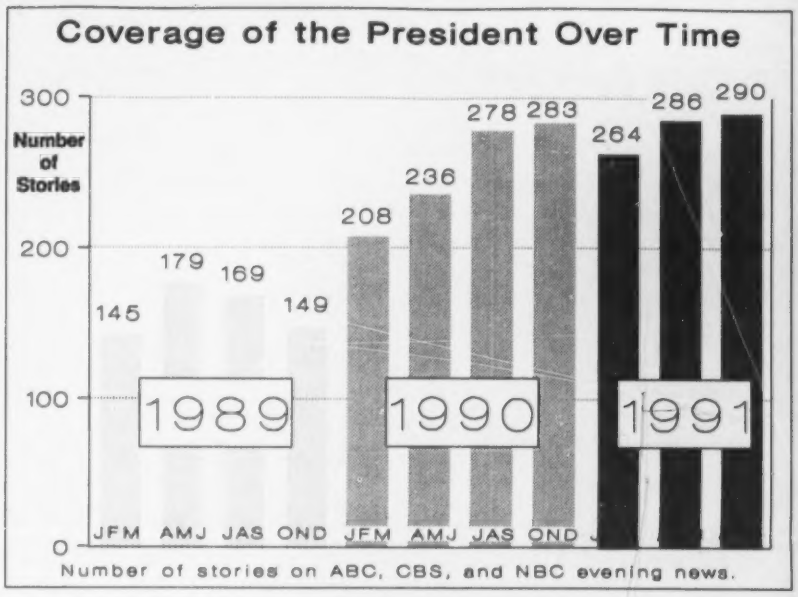
Center Stage

Saturation coverage of the Persian Gulf War boosted the Bush administration's visibility in 1991. Through September 30, nearly one out of every five stories on the network evening newscasts focused on the administration-- 2,037 stories overall, totalling 59 hours of airtime. NBC ran the fewest stories (651), but accounted for the most airtime (20 hours 50 minutes), followed by ABC, which aired 723 stories (totalling 19 hours 29 minutes) and CBS (663 stories, 18 hours 41 minutes). These totals reflect a marked increase over previous years. In 1991, the administration averaged 7.6 stories per night, compared to 6.1 stories per night in 1990, and just 5.5 in 1989.

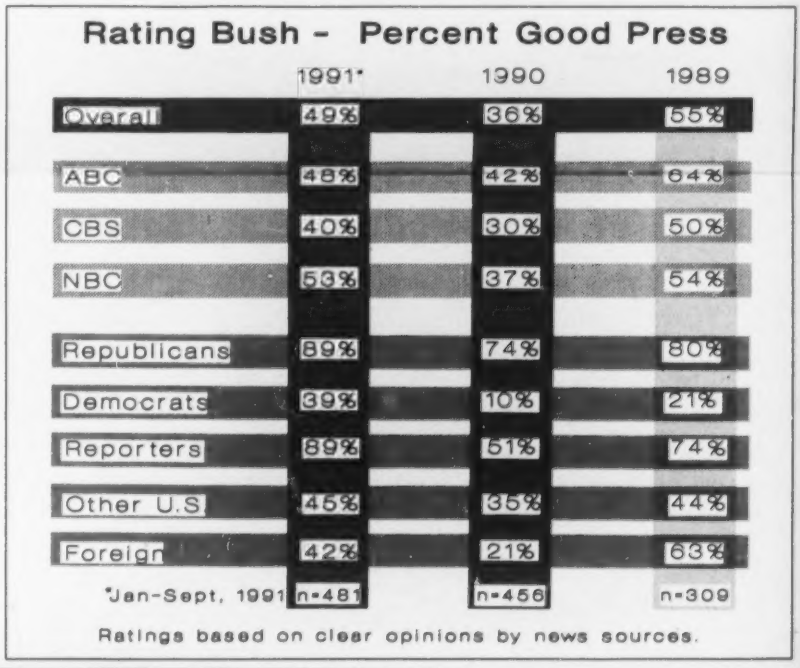
The Gulf crisis also boosted George Bush's personal media profile. Before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, Bush was averaging a total of two stories per night on the three network evening newscasts. Since the invasion he has averaged three stories per night, an increase of 50 percent. Since the Gulf War ended, the president's May hospitalization, his July summit with Mikhail Gorbachev, and early coverage of the nascent 1992 campaign have kept his visibility high.



Finding the Spotlight

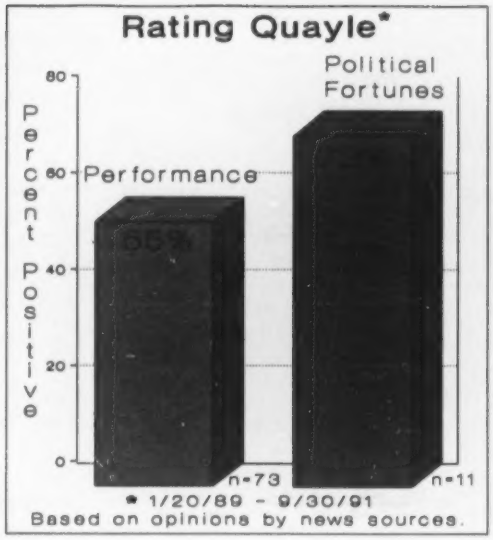
Since his inauguration as president in January, 1989, the networks have aired 1246 evaluations of George Bush on the evening news. A majority (54%) of those opinions have been critical. (We report percentages of good and bad press based only on clearly positive and negative evaluations). Over the past three years, Bush has received his worst marks on CBS, where 60 percent of the comments were negative. Bush's rating on ABC was his most positive (50%), while his image on NBC was only slightly negative (53% negative) over the course of Bush's presidency. Since the Gulf War, however, Bush has fared better on NBC (53% positive, compared to 48% positive on ABC and only 40% on CBS).

The Gulf crisis was a tonic to Bush's media image. For the first three months of 1991, 68 percent of his evaluations were positive, marking the most sustained period of good press in his entire presidency. Bush received considerable support from Democrats, who gave Bush positive ratings 71 percent of the time. But peacetime brought a return to partisan normalcy. Evaluations of Bush by Democratic news sources ran 81 percent negative from April through September 1991. Republicans, while offering consistent support, were outnumbered by their Democratic counterparts. The result has been a 64 percent negative postwar press score for Bush.



Quayle's Comeback

Only 89 stories have focused extensively on Vice President Quayle since he took office in January, 1989, an average of less than three per month. When he is discussed, Quayle receives fairly good press--55 percent positive over three years. This overall balance, however, hides stark divisions of opinion. Much of Quayle's positive press has resulted from President Bush's continued endorsements in the face of continuing criticism. Discounting Bush and other White House sources, Quayle's rating drops to only 41 percent positive press.



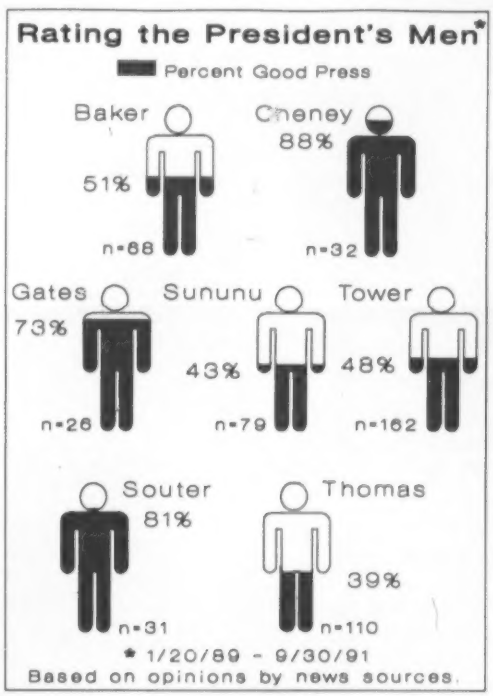
When Bush was hospitalized with an irregular heartbeat in May, 1991, Quayle became the focus of intensive scrutiny. NBC's Jim Miklaszewski quipped, "The very thought of President Dan Quayle caused a few hearts to skip a beat in New York's Central Park." He then quoted one woman who said she'd be "pretty scared." (5/5) Such reports caused pundits to question Quayle's political fortunes. Said one unnamed Republican on ABC, "This is the Achilles heel of this administration, and now it's really swollen." (ABC, 5/5) But most independent sources watched Bush for clues, and his statements of support led 73 percent to agree that Quayle's political position was secure.

Rating the President's Men

When covering the U.S. government, TV typically focuses principally on the President, to the exclusion of most administration officials. But some appointees achieve their own separate identities, not all of them positive. One of Bush's most controversial appointments was the failed nomination of John Tower as Defense Secretary in 1989. Tower faced allegations of excessive drinking, womanizing and of conflicts of interest. A majority (52%) of news sources criticized Tower, with most of his support coming from Bush and other White House sources.

More recently, White House Chief of Staff John Sununu has emerged as a figure of controversy. In the spring of 1991, Sununu was accused of using government airplanes for private trips. Subsequent debate over Sununu's behavior ranged well beyond these allegations. One CBS report (6/27) quoted critical editorials in the Seattle *Times* ("He's intoxicated with power") and the Orlando *Sentinel* ("For a man with an IQ of 180, John Sununu is astonishingly dense"). Nearly three-fifths (57%) of Sununu's coverage has been critical, a figure worse than that of Tower before his Senate rejection.

Both Tower and Sununu would have faced even lower press scores if it had not been for generous amounts of praise from the Bush White House. Sununu's level of good press drops from 43 to 21 percent, a four-to-one negative ratio, when Bush administration sources are discounted. Tower's good press dropped from 48 to 34 percent. In contrast, both Secretary of State James Baker and Defense Secretary Richard Cheney achieved positive press scores independent of White House sources.



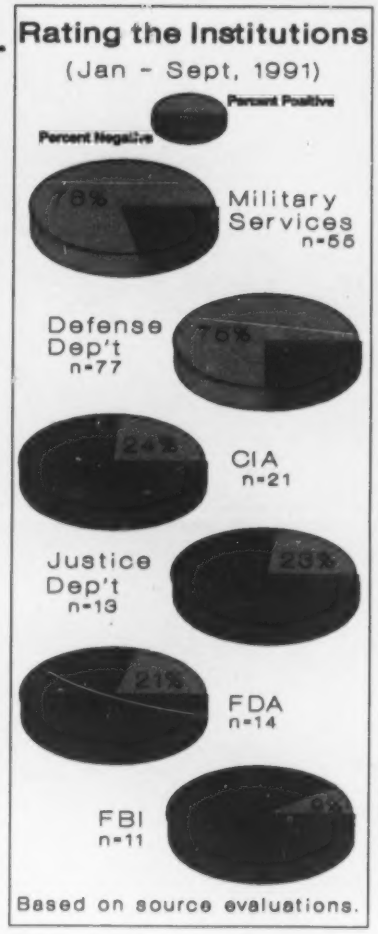
Since taking office, Bush has named two Supreme Court Justices, both of whom received substantial coverage. Televised reaction to David Souter's nomination in 1990 was largely favorable, as 82 percent of sources offered praise. In contrast, Clarence Thomas's nomination last July prompted mainly criticism. Even before Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment, 61 percent of Thomas's evaluations on the three networks were negative, with most comments centered on his EEOC record, his civil rights views, and his conservative ideology. (See *Media Monitor*, October 1991)

Rating the Institutions

The Defense Department and the military services received by far the best press among government agencies in 1991. As the result of Operation Desert Storm, three out of every four evaluations of the military have been positive since January. CBS's Mark Phillips noted in early March, "This was a war where precision weapons and bold maneuvering removed a menace and created a rare opportunity." (3/1/91) Individually, the Air Force, the Army, and the Marines each received better than 80 percent positive press. Only the U.S. Navy, which was criticized for its lingering investigation into the 1989 explosion aboard the *U.S.S. Iowa*, received predominately negative ratings.

Prior to Operation Desert Shield, evaluations of the military were running 70 percent negative during 1990. After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, however, the military's media image leaped to 67 percent positive for the rest of the year. For example, General Norman Schwarzkopf told ABC, "American troops are the best people in the whole world, and they deserve all the support they can get." (ABC, 8/31/90)

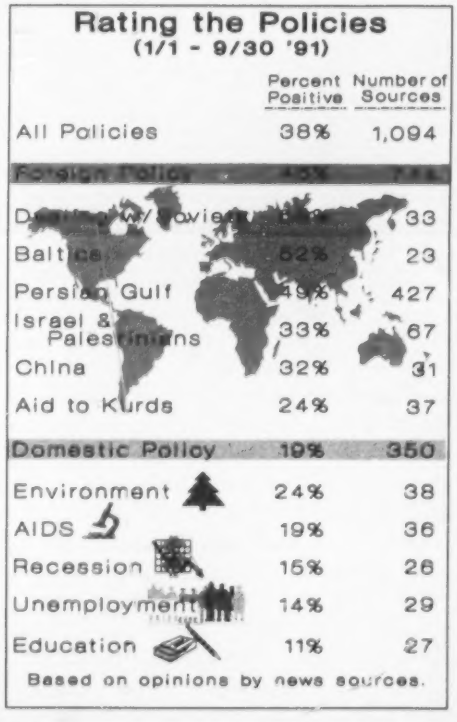
Other U.S. agencies fared poorly in 1991. Accusations of failures in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, as well as introspective analyses caused by its change in directors, helped give the CIA a 76 percent negative rating. The Justice Department was criticized over its involvement in the Wichita abortion demonstrations. Overall, civilian agencies received a combined rating that was more than four-to-one negative (18% positive).



Rating the Policies

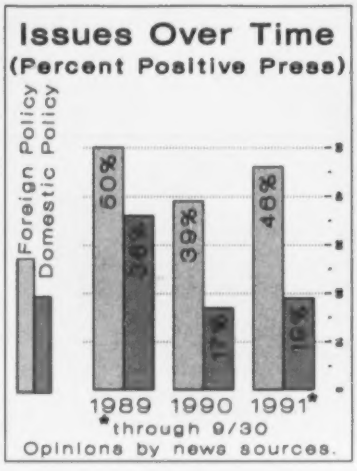
The Persian Gulf War was by far the most heavily debated of all Bush administration policies. Over the course of 1991, more than 400 sources expressed their views on Bush's Gulf policies, with slightly more than half (51%) offering criticism. "American diplomacy has been outstanding in this crisis," opined NBC's John Chancellor on January 18, just after the U.S. began its bombing campaign. CBS's David Martin struck a different chord after the fighting ended. "It is certainly safe to say that in calling off the slaughter of the Iraqi army, the President left Saddam with the weapons he is now using to slaughter his own people." (3/29) Overall, though, Bush's Gulf policies received 49 percent good press both during and after the war.

Other foreign policy areas also received high ratings in 1991. Majorities praised Bush's handling of the Soviet Union and his dealings with the breakaway Baltic republics. The failure of the attempted coup against Soviet President Gorbachev was good news for Bush. On the day of the coup, Bush faced criticism, including one jab from a Soviet expert who told ABC that "Bush has always put too much faith in personal diplomacy, personal relations with Gorbachev." (ABC, 8/19) Gorbachev's return to power three days later, and his appreciative phone call to his U.S. counterpart, shifted the conventional wisdom back in Bush's favor. Bush's announcement of unilateral U.S. nuclear weapons cuts in late September also prompted positive reviews of his Soviet policies.

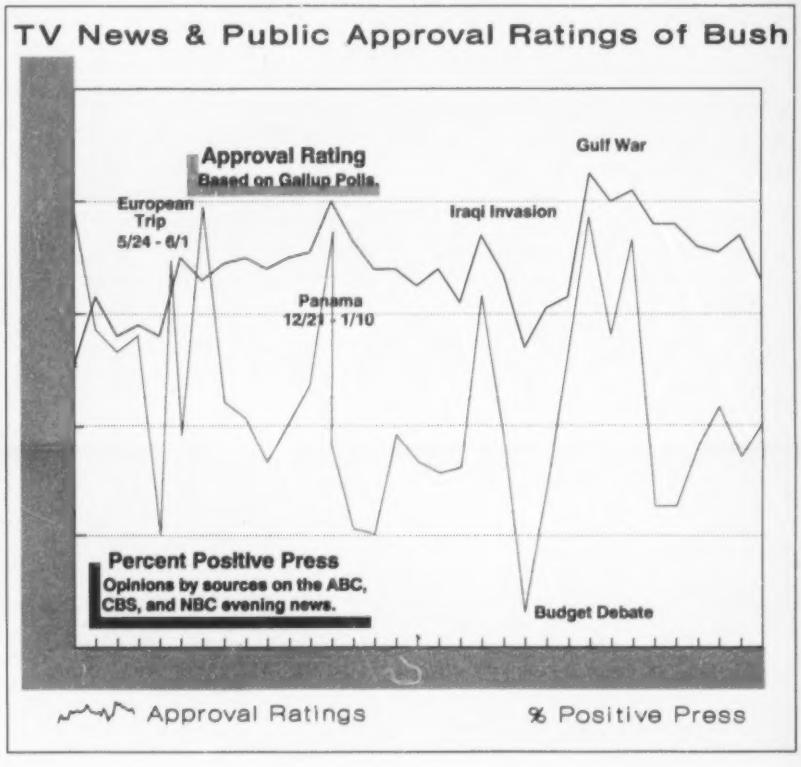


On domestic policy, however, Bush's ratings were as low as ever. Evaluations of his domestic policies ran 81 percent negative in 1991, a figure surpassed only by the 83 percent negative rating they received in 1990. Every major domestic policy area received highly negative reviews in 1991. Best of the bad reviews: Bush's environmental policies were panned by "only" 76 percent of sources. For instance, Senator Albert Gore (D-TN) remarked, "Anyone who sees George Bush as the environmental president at the Grand Canyon ought to look closely for Elvis, alive and well, rafting down the Colorado River." (ABC, 9/18)

Over the course of his presidency, Bush's foreign policy initiatives have consistently received more favorable ratings than his domestic policies. In 1989, there was a 14 percentage point gap in news evaluations of the two spheres. In 1990, the gap widened to 22 points. The Persian Gulf War increased the gap in 1991 to 25 points (46% positive on foreign policy vs. 19% on domestic policy). Thus, on Bush's sixty-seventh birthday, Rep. Vic Fazio (D-CA) told CBS, "This President wouldn't know a domestic agenda if it walked up to him and wished him a happy birthday at his party tonight." (6/12)



Bush's best press has been associated with his foreign policies, notably arms control initiatives, the invasion of Panama in December 1989, and the Persian Gulf War. Indeed, Bush's best news month came in March 1991, when 77 percent of news sources provided positive evaluations in the wake of the Gulf War. Gallup polls showed that his approval ratings jumped by nine percentage points that month, from 80 to 89 percent positive. Bush's worst month came in October 1990, when his highly publicized disputes with Congress over the budget triggered a 94 percent negative press rating. Bush's approval rating dropped 13 points during that same period, from 67 percent to 54 percent in the Gallup polls.


TV News & Public Approval Ratings of Bush
Approval Rating
Based on Gallup Polls.
European Trip 5/24 - 6/1
Panama 12/21 - 1/10
Iraqi Invasion
Gulf War
Budget Debate
Percent Positive Press
Opinions by sources on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news.
Approval Ratings
% Positive Press

Media Momentum

The ebb and flow of George Bush's public approval ratings is directly related to his TV news coverage. Statistically, monthly changes in Bush's good press/bad press ratio are highly correlated (r=.73) with changes in monthly Gallup polls asking people to assess his performance as president. During the past 33 months, Bush's poll ratings have consistently shifted in the direction of his media ratings, especially whenever the coverage was both intensive and one-sided. These shifts in his public approval have followed, not preceded, the shifts in news coverage. This suggests that it is not public opinion which is influencing news coverage, but the news that is driving opinion.

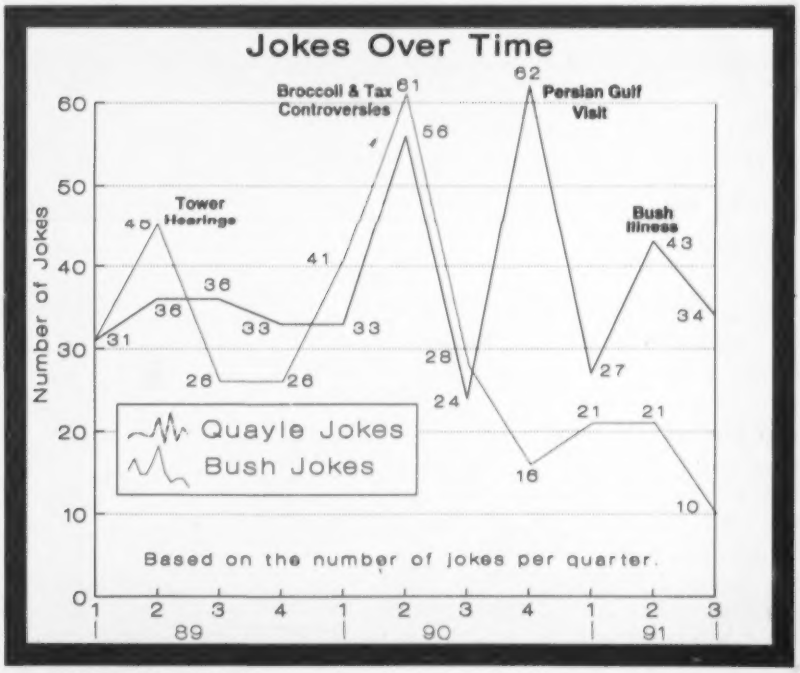
Punchlines

Over the past 33 months we have logged over 7,000 jokes about current affairs on the "Tonight Show," "Late Night with David Letterman," and the "Arsenio Hall Show." Dan Quayle tops the list as the most frequent target, but this was not always the case. In 1989, George Bush won this dubious honor. In the two subsequent years, however, the vice president has led the list. In fact, jokes about George Bush have declined since July 1990, while Quayle jokes are on the rise.

Quayle achieved his peak exposure during the early days of the Persian Gulf crisis; the president's heart problems a few months later created a second highlight. On the other hand Bush received considerable attention during the Tower confirmation hearings, and in the spring of 1990 when he broke his no new taxes pledge. For instance, Carson joked, "Bush said today that when he promised there would be no new taxes, he had his lips crossed." (5/10/90) A few days earlier Leno was more blunt, "During the campaign, George Bush said that he would not raise taxes, ... This last week he said he was considering the possibility of raising taxes. He said, 'Read my lips, I was lying'." (5/8/90)

Quayle jokes are a perennial favorite of late night humor, and vary only slightly in their forms. During the 1988 campaign, the comics targeted his military service record, privileged background and youth. With the exception of the Persian Gulf War, Quayle's service record and background have faded from the monologues. The emphasis has been on his youth, with Mr. Quayle frequently portrayed as a child. For instance, Jay Leno joked, "Dan Quayle had a birthday this week. They had a huge party for him at Chuck E. Cheese." (2/5/91) Later in the year he added that Quayle, "went to see 'City Slickers' and 'Backdraft' over the weekend and now he doesn't know whether he wants to be a cowboy or a fireman." (6/17/91) Arsenio Hall observed, "There's a big difference between being a big wheel and riding one." (3/28/91) Carson joked about the President's birthday party, "They had a big picnic at the White House. The President got smart this year, he got a big Slip 'n' Slide to keep Dan Quayle busy." (6/13/91)

Just outside the top ten targets, but rising fast, is John Sununu. His problems with "Air Sununu" were the butt of 57 jokes. For example, Carson quipped, "Lockheed just got another big military contract, making the bombers to take John Sununu on vacation." (4/25/91) A few days later Leno joined in, "The space shuttle took off, but it's six hours behind schedule. They had to take a detour to drop John Sununu off in Aspen." (4/30/91) Hall led off one monologue, "Welcome to the show. My name is John Sununu. I love to fly and it shows." (6/27/91)



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After the Storm

TV News Middle East Coverage Since the Gulf War

How have the TV networks covered the search for lasting peace in the Middle East? During the eight months from the end of the Gulf War through the Madrid Peace Conference, the ABC, CBS and NBC evening newscasts featured 2048 stories on the Middle East, with a combined airtime over 51 hours. We analyzed evaluations of the countries and individuals involved in the region, the Arab and Israeli peace proposals, and the visual images of the war's aftermath. This issue also tracks political humor directed at the Middle East on late-night TV talk shows.

Major findings:

- **Arabs vs. Israelis** Arab proposals dominated the news. Most sources endorsed "land for peace" but rejected Israel's ouster from the occupied territories. *Page 4*

- **Allies vs. Iraq** The U.S. and its allies were criticized almost as heavily as Iraq. Yitzhak Shamir's level of bad press was exceeded only by Saddam Hussein's. *Page 3*

- **CBS vs. Bush** CBS gave the worst press to George Bush's Middle East policies. *Page 3*

- **ABC vs. CBS & NBC** ABC aired the most support of Arab peace proposals, and the most criticism of Israel and the U.S. military. *Page 5*

- **Words vs. Pictures** Nearly as many pictures of casualties and wreckage were shown after the war as during the war. *Page 5*

- **Leno vs. Saddam** TV talk show monologues average more than a joke per night about Iraq. *Page 6*

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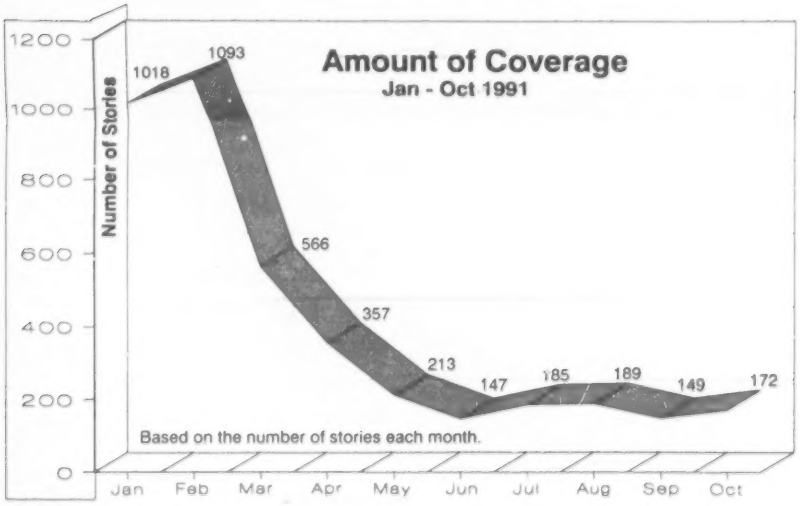
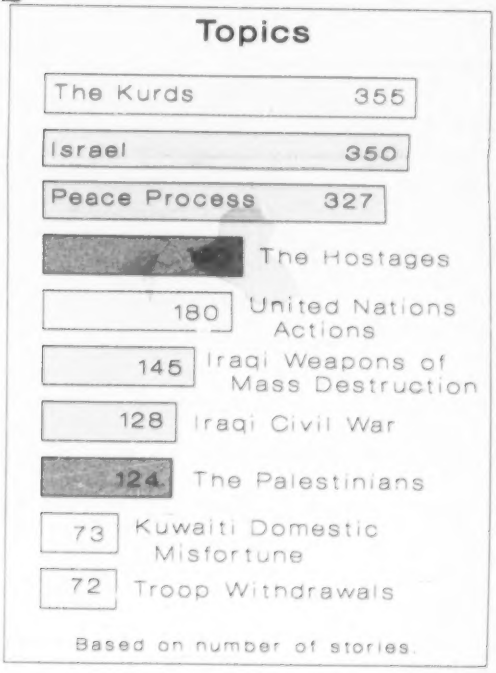
The Middle East was by far the biggest TV news story of 1991, as intensive coverage of the Persian Gulf War and its aftermath was followed by the hunt for a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. During the six weeks of armed conflict in January and February, the three major network evening newscasts broadcast an extraordinary 1,733 Gulf-related stories, the most intensive coverage of any story in television history. The cease-fire slowed but by no means stopped the flow of Middle East news. From the end of the Gulf War (February 28) through the Madrid Peace Conference (November 1), the three network evening newscasts aired 2048 stories on the Middle East, with a cumulative airtime of more than 51 hours. ABC led with 725 stories and more than 18 hours of coverage. CBS broadcast 664 pieces (15 hours), while NBC devoted fewer stories (659) but more airtime (more than 17 hours) to the region.

The coverage was heaviest immediately after the war, with 566 stories in March, followed by 357 stories in April, as attention turned to the plight of the Kurds in Iraq. The amount of coverage varied little thereafter, averaging about 150 to 200 stories per month. The U.S. military's effort to provide a safe haven for the Kurds, the Middle East peace initiative and the release of Western hostages all contributed to coverage of the region.



The Big Three

Three issues dominated coverage of the Middle East after the Gulf War, accounting for one-third of all news topics. The unsuccessful Kurdish revolt against the Iraqi regime generated the most news, with 355 stories. U.S. and Allied efforts to provide a safe zone for Kurdish refugees contributed 139 of these stories.



Coverage of Israel followed close behind, with 350 stories discussing such issues as the building of settlements in the occupied territories, a quarrel with the Bush administration over loan guarantees, and Israel's position on a regional peace settlement. The possibilities for peace and the subsequent Madrid Peace Conference rounded out the top three topics, accounting for 327 stories. Contributing to this number was the U.S. effort to exploit a perceived "window of opportunity" to establish a peacekeeping structure for the region.

A second tier of topics included the Western hostages in Lebanon (190 stories) and the actions of the United Nations (180 stories). The U.N. was instrumental in the continuing embargo against Iraq, inspections of Iraqi nuclear weapons plants, and mediating the hostage situation. Also included in the top ten topics:

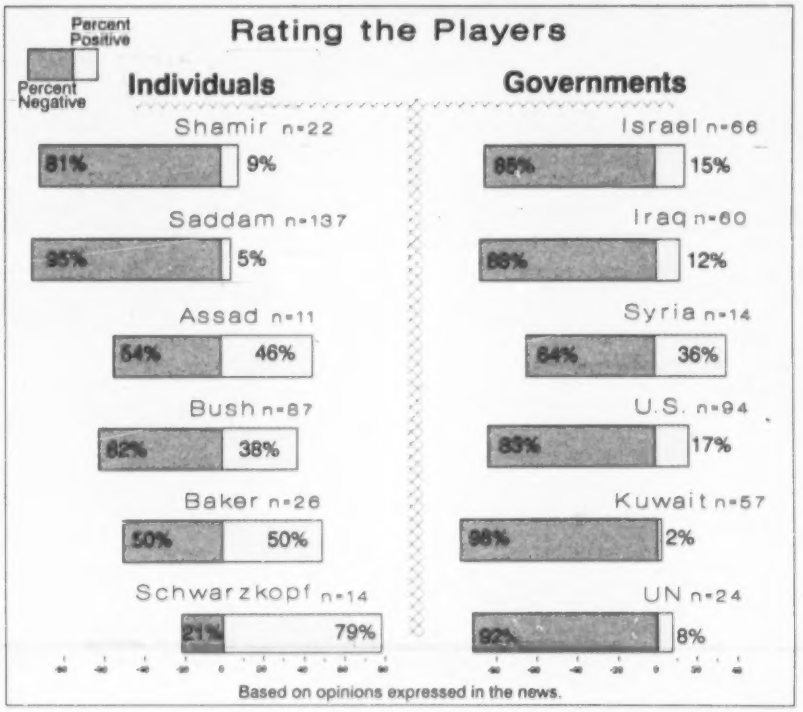
The hunt for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (145 stories), the Iraqi civil war (128), the Palestinians (124), the destruction visited on Kuwait in the Gulf War (73), and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Middle East (72).

No Heros

The afterglow of the allied victory over Iraq faded quickly. Every government and head of state involved in the postwar search for Middle East peace came under heavy criticism in the media. Not surprisingly, the worst press for any individual went to Saddam Hussein, who was criticized in 19 out of every 20 opinions. For example, NBC's Fred Francis quoted an unnamed White House official who described Saddam's postwar policy as one of "cheat and retreat." (9/26) But Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir fared almost as badly as Saddam, with a ten to one negative rating. Thus, ABC quoted a Palestinian activist who denounced Shamir's position at the Madrid Conference: "It reflects the attitude and tone of an occupier, of a brutalizing authority." (10/31) The only head of state who even approached a balanced media profile was Syria's President Hafez el-Assad, whose evaluations were 46 percent positive. For example, ABC's Barrie Dunsmore observed, "President Assad is one of the masters of survival in this region and a cagey negotiator." (7/18)

Meanwhile, George Bush's positive media image became a casualty of the quest for peace. Wartime praise for Bush's leadership gave way to criticism of his postwar policies in nearly two out of three opinions. For example, a Kurdish leader complained, "We can no longer trust President Bush." (NBC, 4/20) And an American policy expert criticized Bush's refusal to enter the Iraqi civil war, "He is... helping to preserve Saddam Hussein's regime.... that is a fundamental, unequivocal mistake." (NBC, 3/29) Bush's chief diplomatic and military subordinates fared better than their boss. Secretary of State James Baker received balanced coverage, while four out of five evaluations hailed General Norman Schwarzkopf as a conquering hero.

The criticism of Bush was heaviest on CBS, which has consistently been the American president's harshest critic among the three networks (*Media Monitor*, 11/91). Three out of four evaluations (74%) on CBS were negative, while the other two networks aired identical proportions of 57 percent negative to 43 percent positive evaluations. For example, CBS correspondent David Martin charged that, "the president left Saddam with weapons he is now using to slaughter his own people." (3/29) When evaluations of Bush and Baker are combined, the difference is even sharper -- about evenly balanced (49% positive) on ABC and NBC combined, compared to the same three-to-one negative ratio on CBS.

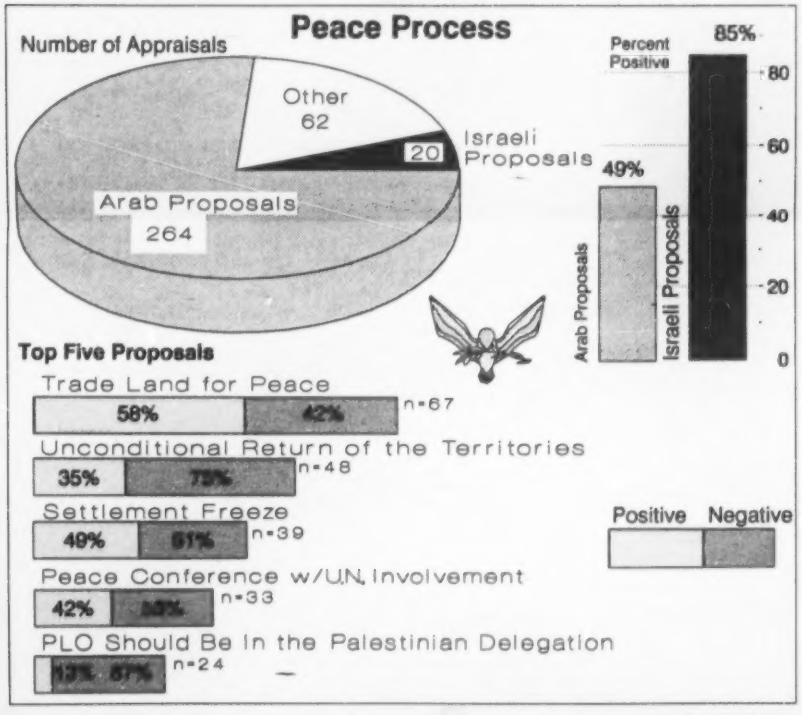


This pattern of across the board criticism encompassed not only the leaders but also their governments. The bad press was so all-inclusive that the U.S. and its Middle East allies fared nearly as badly as Iraq. Combined evaluations of the U.S., Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Israel were 88 percent negative, only slightly better than Iraq's 92 percent negative rating. The ratio of bad to good press was five to one for the United States, six to one for Israel, and an overwhelming 24 to one for Kuwait. The Kuwaiti government was frequently criticized

for the incompetence of its postwar reconstruction efforts. On ABC, a Kuwaiti opposition leader said the regime's policies amounted to "a big fat zero." (3/18) The Israeli government was criticized on numerous fronts. For example, Baker criticized the settlement policy, "It substantially weakens my hand in trying to bring about a peace process and creates quite a predicament." (NBC 5/22) Only Israel's handling of the hostage issue was portrayed favorably. The U.S. government's media image suffered as critics began to charge that its military mastery during the war gave way to diplomatic bungling after the cease-fire. For example, a political scientist told CBS, "even though we achieved the objectives we officially set for ourselves, we couldn't cope with the aftermath." (6/10) The best press (though it amounted to faint praise) went to Syria, whose 36 percent favorable rating was more than twice as high as that of either the U.S. (17%) or Israel (15%).

Peace Proposals

Media attention soon began to shift from the war's aftermath to the quest for future peace in the region. Much of the news revolved around U.S. efforts to induce negotiations among Arab and Israeli foes, spearheaded by Secretary of State Baker's shuttle diplomacy. This new focus produced frequent debate over the various peace proposals that came out of this process. News coverage focused almost exclusively on proposals originating in the Arab world. Evaluations of Arab proposals outnumbered those of Israeli proposals by a 13 to one margin. Overall, debate on the Arab proposals was evenly balanced (49% support vs. 51% opposition). The rare assessments of Israel's proposals were usually (85%) positive.

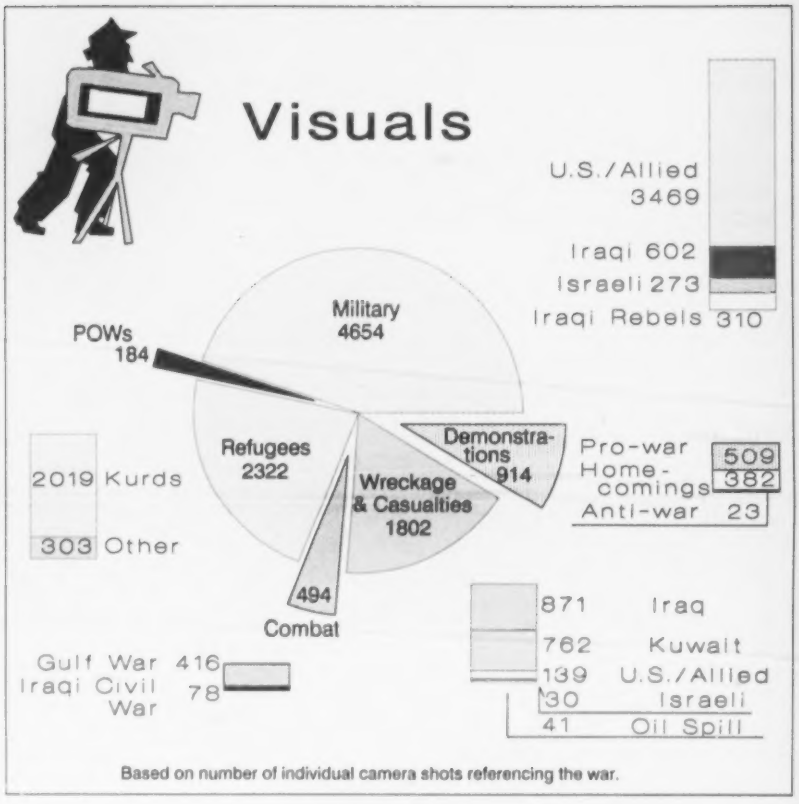


The substantive debate centered on three controversies: the general principle of trading "land for peace," specifically demands that Israel unconditionally give up its occupied territories, and the continued building of new settlements in those areas. By far the most frequent debate concerned the land for peace tradeoff, which was endorsed in nearly three out of five opinions. For example, ABC's Barrie Dunsmore reported, "the Arabs and the U.S. say negotiations should be based on the formula of land for peace." (7/8) Calls for a freeze on new settlements in the occupied territories produced balanced coverage between supporters and opponents, while demands that Israel give up those territories were rejected in nearly two out of three assessments. Thus, Prime Minister Shamir told CBS, "It's my land, it's our land. How can we give up this land?" (10/29) Two other frequently debated issues were procedural matters regarding the peace conference. A majority of opinions rejected calls for a U.N. role, and seven out of eight said the PLO should not be represented in the Palestinian delegation.

Afterimages

During the Gulf War, critics accused the networks of showing Pentagon-produced pictures of successful combat missions but few images of subsequent civilian damage, wreckage, and human misery. The criticism was never entirely valid (*Media Monitor*, 4/91).

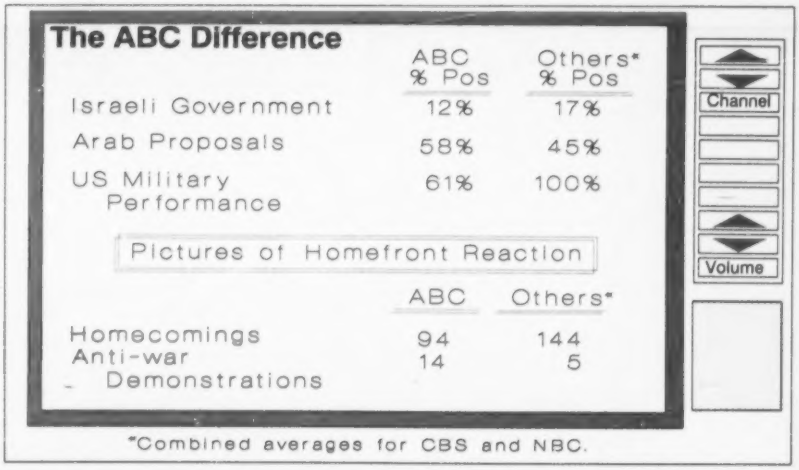
After the war, moreover, the networks responded with a profusion of images documenting the damages. Indeed, the evening news shows aired nearly as many visuals (individual camera shots) of casualties and wreckage after the war (1802) as they had during the war (1922). Damage to Iraq was pictured more often then damage to Kuwait, and almost as often as all Allied damage combined (871 vs. 931 visuals). The misery produced by the war was accentuated by an even greater number of pictures of refugees (2322), including more than 2000 shots of Kurdish refugees. In addition, 494 combat visuals appeared, nearly half as many as the network aired during the actual fighting (1177). All these images of the damage and degradation produced by the war far outnumbered the "triumphalist" footage of domestic celebrations (509 shots) and joyous homecomings of U.S. troops (382). Overall, nearly one-third of all visuals aired on the Middle East since the war have featured military or war-related subject matter, a continuing grim reminder that wars do not end when the shooting stops.



The ABC Difference (continued)

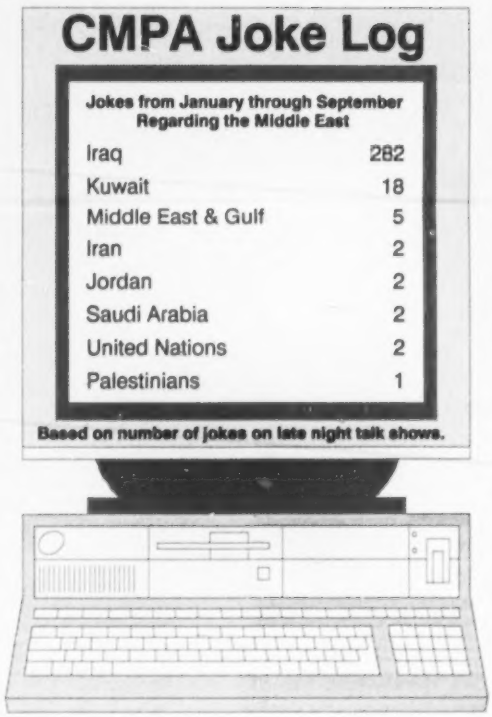
During the Persian Gulf War, our content analysis identified a distinctively anti-war profile on the ABC evening newscast (*Media Monitor*, 4/91). Compared to CBS and NBC, opinions expressed on ABC were the most critical of U.S. and Israeli policy and of the war itself. ABC also ran more stories on anti-war demonstrators and cited more Iraqis and fewer Israelis than its competitors. ABC's postwar coverage of the Middle East continued this distinctive profile with heavy criticism of Israel and the U.S. military, while featuring more support for the Arab peace proposals.

Although all coverage of the Israeli government was highly critical, opinions expressed on ABC were seven to one negative compared with five to one at the other networks. For example, Dean Reynolds quoted an Israeli peace activist who condemned "a major drive by the Israeli government... to block any peace process." (3/28) By contrast, nearly three out of five ABC assessments (58%) supported the various Arab proposals, compared to a minority (45%) at the other networks. For example, activist Hanan Ashrawi told Reynolds, "No Palestinian, no Arab is willing to embark on negotiations or a peace process that has already negated its



own legitimacy by excluding Palestinians from East Jerusalem." (7/25)

ABC's postwar coverage of U.S. Middle East policy, while 80 percent negative, was surpassed by CBS's 94 percent negative evaluations. But ABC continued to provide the least supportive images of U.S. military. Opinions on both CBS and NBC gave the U.S. military a 100 percent positive rating, compared to 61 percent positive on ABC. Thus, all 14 criticisms of the military that were broadcast appeared on ABC. For example, in a story questioning the "stealth" technology touted by the Pentagon for its contribution to the victory over Iraq, Bob Zelnick noted, "Many wonder whether the B-2 has the radar technology to perform one of its key missions -- attacking mobile missiles." Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) then complained, "We had stealth bombers trying to find the Iraqi missiles totally unsuccessfully." (6/11) ABC also aired more visuals of anti-war demonstrators than CBS and NBC combined. By contrast, ABC showed only two-thirds as many homecoming scenes of U.S. troops as did each of the other networks.



Punchlines

The Middle East was a hot topic not only on the evening newscasts but also in the monologues of TV's late night comedians. Most of their barbs were directed toward Iraq and its leader Saddam Hussein. From January 1 through September 30, Saddam was the target of 160 jokes, more than any other individual so far in 1991. (Dan Quayle is a distant second with 106.) Overall 282 jokes were aimed at Iraq and its leader, an average of over one per night. Many of these targeted Saddam's bombast and the fighting spirit of his troops. During the fighting, Arsenio Hall joked that, "Saddam is an Arabic word for Joe Izuzu." (2/13) After the surrender, Jay Leno related an ad in "Guns and Ammo" magazine: "For sale -- 80,000 Iraqi rifles -- never fired, only dropped once." (3/25) More recently, Leno revealed that, "Saddam is preparing for another Gulf War. This time he's gluing the rifles to the soldiers' hands and stealing their underwear so it's harder for them to surrender." (9/26)

Other countries and leaders in the region cropped up as well. Most prominent was Kuwait, whose uncertain process of reconstruction was a source of numerous punchlines. When Kuwait's monarch returned, Carson quipped, "I understand that Bush sent a letter to the Emir of Kuwait today. It said 'Congratulations on the U.S. saving your homeland -- second notice.'" (3/22) And when harsh sentences were meted out to suspected Iraqi collaborators, Hall noted, "One man got twelve years for carrying a key chain around with Iraqi bullets. Another got fifteen years for wearing a Saddam Hussein T-shirt. There's a lesson to be learned here. When you are in Kuwait, don't shop at that Iraqi souvenir stand." (8/28) Continuing around the region, Leno uncovered a little known fact: "Do you know there are an estimated 6500 princes in Saudi Arabia but no frogs?" (3/5) Leno also noted that, "Iran is still trying to promote tourism. Iranian airlines has an offer where terrorists under twelve fly free." (7/22) David Letterman reported that, "Israel has said yes to a Middle East peace conference, but there are some conditions. One of those conditions is that Yasser Arafat must get himself freshened up." (8/2)

The U.S. military became fair game after reports that 36 female crew members became pregnant while the U.S.S. Arcadia was stationed in the Persian Gulf. Leno mused, "So I guess it's true what they say in the commercial: 'We do more before 8:00 a.m. than most people do all day.'" (5/14) Finally, there were some domestic tie-ins, as when Letterman claimed, "the U.N. Security Council has announced they are sending forces to stand around the clock watch. Not to the Persian Gulf but to the Kennedy compound in Palm Beach." (4/5)

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Volume VI Number 1 January 1992

1991 - The Year In Review

TV's Leading News Topics, Reporters, and Political Jokes

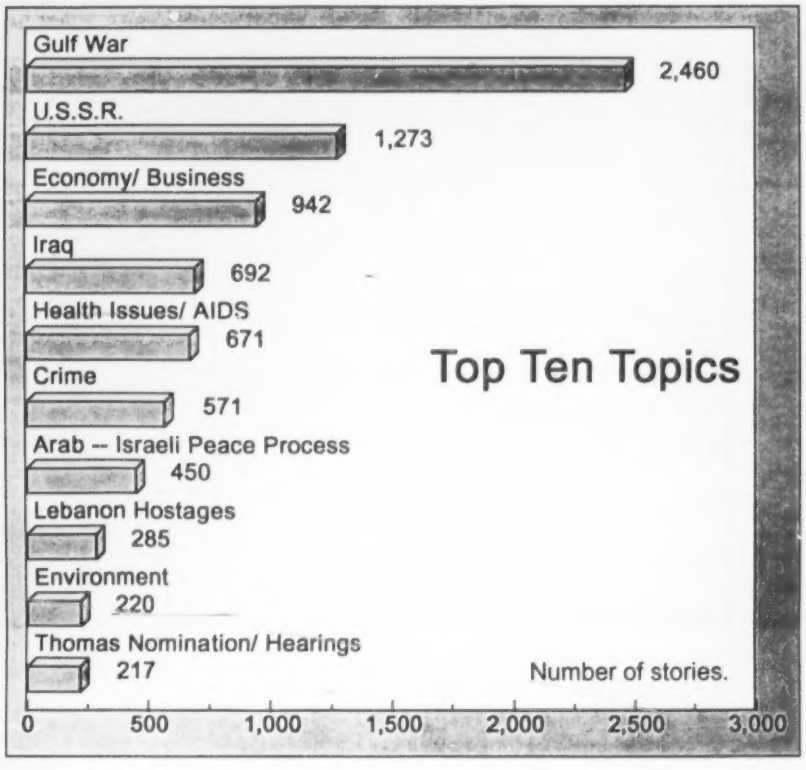
During 1991 we monitored 13,847 news stories broadcast on the ABC, CBS and NBC evening news. We also logged all jokes about public affairs from monologues on the "Tonight Show," "Late Night With David Letterman," and the "Arsenio Hall Show." This annual review issue of *Media Monitor* chronicles the leading news topics and targets of political humor on television during 1991, as well as TV's most visible reporters.

Major findings:

- **The Big Story** The Persian Gulf War produced 2,460 stories on the evening news, the most we have ever logged on any one topic. *Page 2*
- **Money Worries** Over 60 percent of all economic news focused on the recession. *Page 2*
- **Number One Again** NBC's John Cochran was the most visible reporter on the evening news shows for the third straight year. *Page 3*
- **All White News** The 50 most visible field reporters were all whites. Only four of the top 50 were women. *Page 4*
- **Funnier Than Quayle** Saddam Hussein edged out Dan Quayle as the target of the most jokes on late night talk shows. *Page 5*

In The News

During 1991 the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news shows broadcast 13,847 news stories. The ten most heavily covered news topics accounted for a majority (56%) of the entire newshole. Six of last year's top ten topics remained on this year's list. In fact, 1990's top five topics remain atop the 1991 rankings. The Gulf crisis (#1), the Soviet Union (#2), and the U.S. economy (#3) retained their status, while health issues (#5) and crime (#6) dropped a notch from the previous year because of the intensive coverage of Iraq (#4) after the Gulf War. Dropping out of the top ten from 1990 were South Africa, natural disasters, and the federal budget.



The Top Ten

#1 *The Gulf War* The six weeks of bombing and the subsequent 100 hours of ground fighting that made up the Persian Gulf War generated an incredible 2,460 stories, almost doubling the number of stories devoted to the second most frequent topic. Eighteen percent of all stories in 1991 were devoted to this subject. An in-depth report on media coverage of the war was published in the April 1991 *Media Monitor*. Key findings: A majority of sources opposed the war and criticized U.S. policies in the Gulf, but most praised the performance of U.S. troops and weapons. ABC was more likely than CBS or NBC to air criticisms of U.S. leadership and policy.

#2 *The Soviet Union* Coverage of the former Soviet Union and its successor states yielded 1,273 news stories in 1991. The political disintegration of the Union, hastened by a failed coup in August, was the primary focus of coverage. During the last two weeks in August, the networks carried 302 stories on the USSR, a rate of eight stories per network per night. Relations with the United States contributed 145 stories while the worsening economy added 133.

#3 *Economy/Business* The current state of the U.S. economy and business was the topic of 942 stories in 1991. Economic coverage was up 36 percent over last year's total of 692 stories, due to a spurt of coverage at year's end -- 300 stories in November and December alone. Bad news made for big news, as over 60 percent of all economic news focused on the recession and its social costs. The most closely watched indicator was unemployment, which generated 106 stories. News of the economy was the focus of the May 1991 *Media Monitor*. Key Findings: Ninety-six percent of sources gave a negative appraisal of economic conditions. CBS carried the most pessimistic economic forecasts, while ABC carried the most optimistic ones.

#4 *Postwar Iraq* Coverage of the war's aftermath in Iraq was the subject of 692 stories during 1991. The big story was the Kurdish refugee crisis (280 stories). Another major component (156 stories) was coverage of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and the United Nations' efforts to find them. The Iraqi situation was covered in the December 1991 *Media Monitor*. Key findings: Not only did Saddam Hussein get almost universally bad press on the evening news (95% negative comments), but Iraq was the most frequent target of jokes by late night TV comedians.

#5 *Health Issues/AIDS* Coverage of health issues, including health care costs, insurance, and AIDS, yielded 671 stories in 1991. The health of American children was the subject of

49 stories, while the war on cancer provided another 46. The announcement that basketball star Earvin "Magic" Johnson was HIV positive gave rise to 36 stories; an additional 28 focused on AIDS research. Media coverage of the health care system was the topic of the June/July 1991 issue of *Media Monitor*. Key findings: Most sources rated America's health care system as inadequate, and they unanimously condemned the high cost of both health care and health insurance. The Bush administration's health care programs were criticized by four out of five sources.

#6 *Crime* Crime was a frequent (571 stories) topic of news coverage in 1991. Reports of murders generated 108 stories, led by the serial murders of Jeffrey Dahmer and shooting rampages in a Texas cafeteria and a Michigan post office. An incident of police brutality, videotaped in Los Angeles, sparked nationwide attention (93 stories) to reports of police misconduct. Largely due to the William Kennedy Smith trial, rape was the subject of 51 reports, while gun control added another 50 stories.

#7 *Arab-Israeli Peace Process* The search for peace in the Middle East, including U.S. efforts toward that end, was the subject of 450 news reports. The plight of the Palestinians, a squabble between the U.S. and Israel over loan guarantees, and Bush administration attempts to coerce and cajole the region's players to the negotiating table all contributed heavily. The Arab-Israeli peace process was examined in the December 1991 *Media Monitor*. Key findings: Arab peace proposals dominated the news. Most sources endorsed "land for peace" but rejected Israel's unconditional ouster from the occupied territories. ABC aired the most support of Arab peace proposals and the most criticism of Israel.

#8 *Western Hostages* The long-awaited homecomings of the Western hostages held by pro-Iranian kidnappers in Lebanon were featured in 285 stories. Most coverage was clustered late in the year, focusing on United Nations mediation, the release of hostages Terry Waite and Terry Anderson, and profiles of hostages trying to reassimilate themselves into society.

#9 *Environment* Attention to the environment dropped nearly 60 percent, down to 220 stories from 373 in 1990. Nonetheless, environmental news retained its 1990 ranking as the ninth heaviest topic of news coverage. The plight of wildlife, including species in danger of extinction, contributed 50 stories to the total. Pollution was the topic of 64 stories, half of which concerned the damaging effects of oil spills.

#10 *Thomas Nomination/Hearings* The nomination and appointment of Judge Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court attracted heavy coverage that began in July and peaked during the televised Senate hearings in October. The network evening newscasts devoted 217 stories to this topic, in addition to their live coverage of the hearings. The nomination process of Judge Thomas was the subject of the October 1991 issue of *Media Monitor*. Key findings: Judge Thomas received mainly good press for his personal background but bad press for both his fitness and philosophy. A majority of black sources criticized Thomas, while most whites praised him. Most sources praised Professor Anita Hill personally but rejected her allegations.

"This was the year America went to war and the Soviet Union went out of business."

Connie Chung
NBC News
12/31/91

"Throughout the year, live, breaking news overshadowed everything else on TV."

Electronic Media
1/6/92

Names and Faces

CMPA researchers recorded every appearance by an anchor or reporter on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts during 1991. All reporters were ranked in terms of the number of stories they filed, including field reports done by anchors. NBC's White House correspondent, John Cochran, was the most visible reporter for the third straight year. His 186 stories not only led the field but also topped his own 1990 total of 176. Anchors Peter Jennings (#2), Tom Brokaw (#3), and Dan Rather (#10) all ranked among the top ten field reporters, even after excluding more than 3,000 anchor-read "tell stories." The importance of the major Washington "beats" -- the White House, Congress, the Pentagon, and the State Department -- is illustrated by the prominence of reporters covering them. Only one of the top ten full time reporters, NBC's Robert Hager, did not have a regular Washington beat.

For network journalists who served as anchors, we recorded all "tell stories" -- brief news items read by the anchor, from his or her desk, often without pictures. Among the big three, ABC's Peter Jennings led with 1,265 such reports, followed by CBS's Dan Rather (995), and NBC's Tom Brokaw (893). A second tier, which consisted of regular weekend anchors, was led by NBC's Garrick Utley's 403 reports.

Top 50 Reporters

	Stories	Race	Gender	Network
1) John Cochran	186	W	M	(NBC)
2) Peter Jennings	170	W	M	(ABC)
3) Tom Brokaw	170	W	M	(NBC)
4) Brit Hume	134	W	M	(ABC)
5) Andrea Mitchell	123	W	F	(NBC)
6) Robert Hager	120	W	M	(NBC)
7) John McWethy	117	W	M	(ABC)
8) Susan Spencer	115	W	F	(CBS)
9) David Martin	113	W	M	(CBS)
10) Dan Rather	113	W	M	(CBS)
11) Bob Schieffer	107	W	M	(CBS)
12) Bob Zelnick	97	W	M	(ABC)
13) John Dancy	97	W	M	(NBC)
14) Robert Bazell	93	W	M	(NBC)
15) Fred Francis	93	W	M	(NBC)
16) Rita Braver	91	W	F	(CBS)
17) Martin Fletcher	90	W	M	(NBC)
18) Mike Jensen	90	W	M	(NBC)
19) Jim Laurie	87	W	M	(ABC)
20) Garrick Utley	83	W	M	(NBC)
21) Dean Reynolds	81	W	M	(ABC)
22) Wyatt Andrews	79	W	M	(CBS)
23) Keith Morrison	79	W	M	(NBC)
24) Irvine R. Levine	78	W	M	(NBC)
25) Stephen Aug	77	W	M	(ABC)
26) Anthony Mason	76	W	M	(CBS)
27) Tom Aspell	76	W	M	(NBC)
28) Scott Pelley	75	W	M	(CBS)
29) Bob Abernethy	73	W	M	(NBC)
30) Jim Cummins	72	W	M	(NBC)
31) Eric Engberg	71	W	M	(CBS)
32) Jerry Bowen	70	W	M	(CBS)
33) Ray Brady	70	W	M	(CBS)
34) Mark Phillips	70	W	M	(CBS)
35) Roger O'Neil	69	W	M	(NBC)
36) Bruce Morton	68	W	M	(CBS)
37) Tom Fenton	68	W	M	(CBS)
38) Bill Plante	68	W	M	(CBS)
39) George Lewis	67	W	M	(NBC)
40) Bill Redeker	65	W	M	(ABC)
41) Richard Threlkeld	65	W	M	(CBS)
42) Brad Willis	65	W	M	(NBC)
43) Edie Magnus	63	W	F	(CBS)
44) Mike Boettcher	63	W	M	(NBC)
45) Jim Maceda	63	W	M	(ABC)
46) Jim Wooten	59	W	M	(ABC)
47) John Blackstone	59	W	M	(CBS)
48) Jim Stewart	59	W	M	(CBS)
49) John Donvan	57	W	M	(ABC)
50) Allen Pizzey	57	W	M	(CBS)

"It was a year in which television was blamed for nearly everything that went wrong, and why not? It's probably guilty."

—
Tom Shales
Washington Post
1/2/92

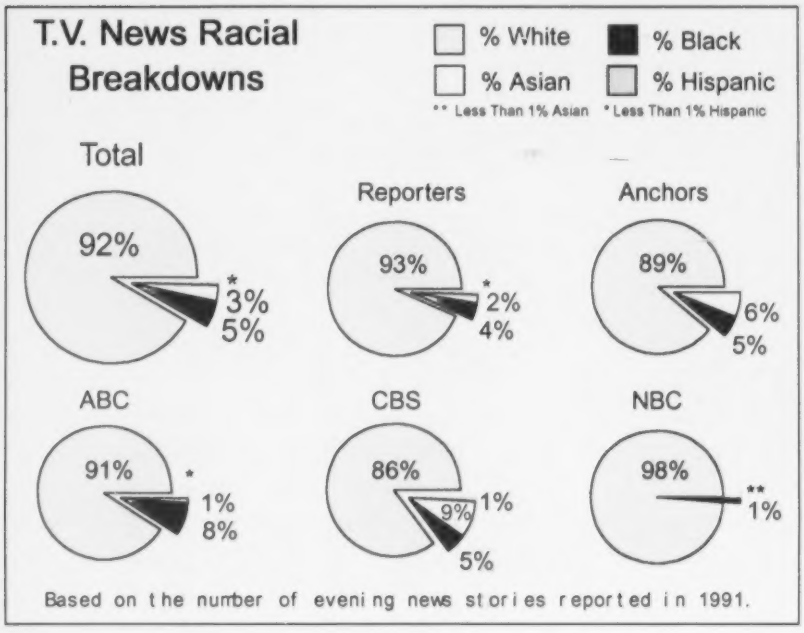
Several, such as Diane Sawyer and Sam Donaldson (Primetime Live), Harry Smith (CBS This Morning), and Charles Kuralt (Sunday Morning) hosted other programs as their primary responsibility.

Most of the nightly news in 1991 was presented by white males. Overall, only one in every six news items (16%) was reported by a woman. Women were more visible as anchors (accounting for six of the top 15) than as field reporters (only four of the top 50). Most of the female representation was accounted for by a few highly visible "stars," such as anchors Connie Chung and Carole Simpson and reporters Andrea Mitchell and Susan Spencer.

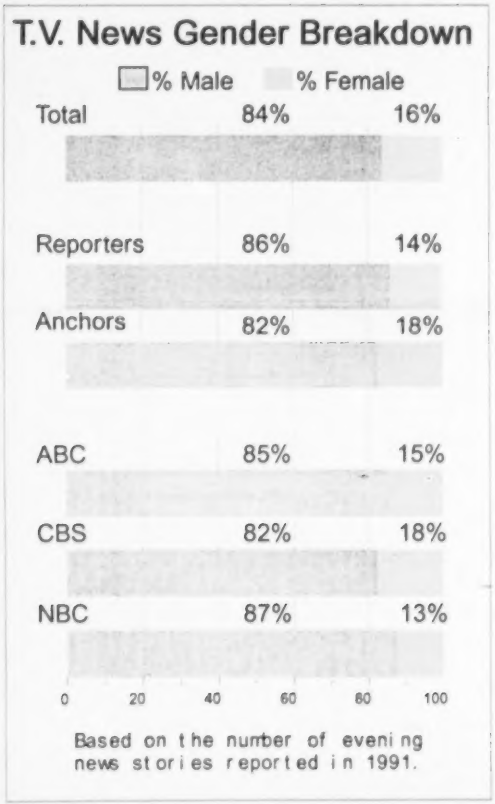
Racial minorities were even less visible. Blacks accounted for only five percent of all field reports and anchor stories combined, Asians for three percent, and Hispanics for less than one percent. Remarkably, all of the top 50 reporters were white. The most visible minority group members were ABC's Ken Kashiwahara and George Strait, who tied for 57th place with 53 stories apiece. Among the networks, CBS's cast of reporters had the most diversity, with 14 percent minority and 18 percent female

Top Anchors

	Stories	Race	Gender	Network
Peter Jennings	1,265	W	M	ABC
Dan Rather	995	W	M	CBS
Tom Brokaw	893	W	M	NBC
Garrick Utley	403	W	M	NBC
Connie Chung	310	A	F	CBS
Carole Simpson	251	B	F	ABC
Forest Sawyer	143	W	M	ABC
Diane Sawyer	114	W	F	ABC
Sam Donaldson	110	W	M	ABC
Jane Pauley	106	W	F	NBC
Harry Smith	71	W	M	CBS
Faith Daniels	55	W	F	NBC
Charles Kuralt	48	W	M	CBS
Ed Bradley	47	B	M	CBS
Mary Alice Williams	47	W	F	NBC



representation. NBC was the least diverse, with only two percent of stories reported by racial minorities and 13 percent by women. ABC finished midway between its competitors, with nine percent minority and 15 percent female reporters.



Punchlines

During 1991 Center researchers recorded and categorized 2,768 jokes on the "Tonight Show," "Late Night with David Letterman," and the "Arsenio Hall Show." Saddam Hussein displaced 1990 champion Dan Quayle as the year's most joked about individual. Most of the 160 Hussein jokes occurred during and immediately after the Gulf War. But there was a second spate of jokes in September, after the United Nations teams uncovered plans for Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. Leno joked, "To give you an idea of how evil Saddam Hussein is, the leaders of an assassination attempt were hanged and then decapitated. And those were the ones who took the plea bargain." (7/11) Arsenio turned poetic on Hussein's birthday, "You called it the mother of all wars. / It was a tale too tall. / But Happy Birthday anyway. / To the biggest mother of them all." (4/29) Carson also joked about Hussein's birthday, "One of Saddam's soldiers gave him a gag gift. He gave him a copy of Schwarzkopf's video. ...The services will be held tomorrow." (5/1)

Finishing a close second was Vice President Quayle with 150 jokes. A common thread was Quayle's comic persona as a juvenile among adults. For instance, Letterman joked, "We all know that President Bush carries a black book containing secret codes for launching nuclear missiles, but did you know there is another book made expressly for the use of the Vice President? It's called the Big Golden Book of ICBM codes." (10/31) At the end of November Letterman reported that, "When asked how to end the recession, Vice President Dan Quayle said, 'Play some golf, watch some cartoons, that's what I do when I'm recessed'." (11/21) Arsenio joked that the Drug Enforcement Agency released a report disclosing, "...that in 1984 Quayle checked himself into the Betty Ford Clinic to deal with a dependency on Flintstone's vitamins... apparently at one point it was so bad that he was up to 10 Dinos a day." (11/11) During the Thomas hearings, Leno cracked, "...at one point the testimony was so graphic President Bush had to send Dan Quayle out of the room." (10/16) And during the summer Carson quipped, "I worry about a vice president who wears a Bart Simpson t-shirt." (7/29)

President Bush placed third on the list as the target of 111 punchlines. The comics focused most heavily on his handling of the economy

Media Monitor

as the year drew to a close. Carson observed, "You know what the big fragrances are this year? Liz Taylor's Passion, Calvin Klein's Obsession and George Bush's Recession." (12/19) Leno jibed, "Normally we would count down the end of the year by going to Times Square and watching the ball drop. This year we're just going to put up a big graph of Bush's popularity and watch that come down." (12/31) Arsenio offered this helpful note, "For those of you keeping score, that's two things that no longer exist since Bush took office -- the Soviet Union and the American middle class." (12/18)

John Sununu found his way into monologues 76 times, initially over his use of official airplanes for private trips, and again in December when he resigned. Carson joked, "Lockheed just got another big military contract -- making the bombers to take John Sununu on vacation." (4/25) In an early prognostication Letterman ran the "Top Ten Signs Sununu is About to be Fired." They included, " 'I'm with Sununu' t-shirts removed from White House gift shop." and "In 1560, Nostradamus wrote, 'A fat guy with a funny name will fly free and get fired.'" (6/25) After noting the president's plans for a traditional Thanksgiving dinner, Leno jibed, "If you believe the rumors, counting John Sununu that makes two turkeys in the White House that won't be flying anymore." (11/28)

Jokes about Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas appeared 72 times in late night monologues to round out the top five most frequent targets. Early jokes picked up on his admitted youthful use of marijuana, "How come when politicians did drugs they call it experimenting? Am I supposed to believe this guy sat in the chemistry lab with a spiral notebook and a bunsen burner?" (Leno 7/16) Later the humor turned on his apparent lack of opinions during his confirmation hearings. Carson quipped, "Everybody is talking about the 'Murphy Brown' episode except Clarence Thomas. He is withholding comment on her pregnancy until the final episode." (9/18) Finally, there were barbs about sexual harassment. Letterman ran the "Top Ten Clarence Thomas Pick-up Lines." Our top three were: "How about a little affirmative action?" "This robe is big enough for the two of us." "How about a peek at exhibits A and B?" (10/09)

Top Ten Individuals

	Jokes
1. Saddam Hussein	160
2. Dan Quayle	150
3. George Bush	111
4. John Sununu	76
5. Clarence Thomas	72
6. Ted Kennedy	70
7. David Duke	51
8. Jimmy Swaggert	46
9. Mario Cuomo	38
10. Mikhail Gorbachev	37

Based on number of jokes.

Senator Edward Kennedy was the target of 70 jokes, mostly aimed at his role in the Palm Beach rape case and how it affected his behavior at the Thomas hearings. For example, "They keep questioning [Thomas] on what his opinion is on natural law. Now Senator Kennedy's view on natural law is that any part of the cocktail waitress that hangs over the table belongs to you." (Carson 9/12) In seventh place was Republican Presidential candidate David Duke with 51 jokes. Almost half of these were told by Arsenio Hall, who kept close tabs on Duke's electoral progress. Prior to the Louisiana gubenatorial election Arsenio joked, "He told reporters that his Ku Klux Klan days were just a youthful indiscretion. That's like saying the Manson murders were wacky college pranks." (10/21) After Duke announced his candidacy for the presidency, Arsenio observed, "In his heart he probably does not think that he will make a good president. He just wants to live in a place called the White House." (11/19) By contrast, Johnny Carson told only three David Duke jokes. They included this gem, "Yesterday former Governor Edwards called former KKK member and former Nazi member, David Duke, a bigot. Duke said he preferred to be called hatefully challenged." (Carson 11/8) Jimmy Swaggert's problems with prostitutes made him the target of 46 jokes. Perennial maybe-candidate Mario Cuomo was the butt of 38 jokes. Carson cracked, "Well, Mario Cuomo finally made a big decision today. After years of soul searching he finally decided to make the switch from Beta to VHS." (11/14) A month later Carson quipped, "Tonight on the Sports Channel there's an exciting twelve round bout. Mario Cuomo wrestling with his conscience." (12/19) The top ten was completed by Mikhail Gorbachev, who was targeted in 37 jokes.

Among the also rans this year was Ronald Reagan, who fell out of the the top ten for the first time since leaving office. His 32 jokes placed him eleventh in late night monologues. None of the announced Democratic presidential candidates could match the humor of Mario Cuomo's indecision. Only Paul Tsongas (15) and Jerry Brown (11) broke into the double digits. Michael Dukakis (seven jokes) attracted almost twice the coverage of any of this year's other Democratic candidates.

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Campaign '92: Early Returns

TV News Coverage of the 1992 Presidential Campaign

How are the media covering the race for the presidency? The Center for Media and Public Affairs is analyzing TV news coverage of the 1992 presidential elections from the 1991 "preseason" reports through the general election in November. This first report from our ongoing study examines 401 election stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts up to the February 18 New Hampshire primary. We also compare current campaign coverage with results from our previous study of the 1988 election.

Major findings:

- **Bashing Bush** President Bush received the worst press of any candidate but David Duke - nearly three-to-one negative. *Page 3*

- **Toasting Tsongas** Paul Tsongas is the only candidate to combine good press (62% positive) with high "horse race" ratings (80% positive). *Page 3 & 4*

- **Watching Clinton** Bill Clinton got as much coverage in 1992 as all his Democratic rivals combined. *Page 3*

- **Here's the Beef** Policy issues were discussed twice as often as the horse race. Issue coverage was three times as heavy as in 1988. *Page 2*

- **Money Matters** The state of the economy was the central focus of election news. Evaluations of the economy were over 90 percent negative. *Page 2*

- **Less is More** The amount of election news dropped by nearly 50 percent from 1988 levels. *Page 2*

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Covering the Kickoff

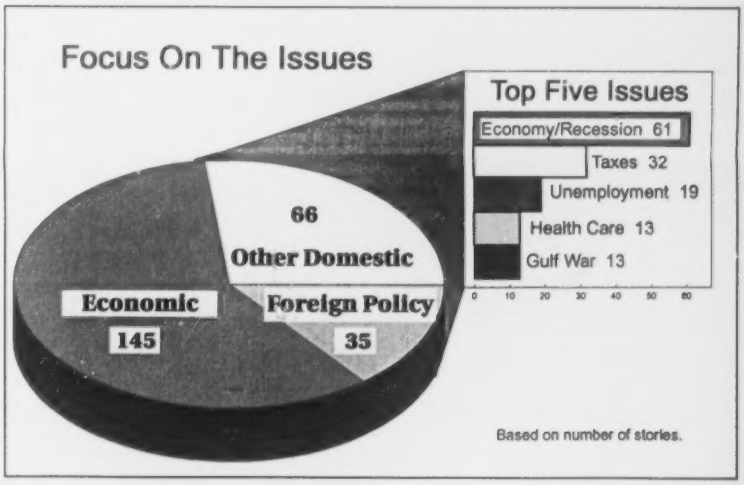
From January 1991 through the eve of the New Hampshire primary on February 17, the three major networks aired 401 stories on the 1992 presidential campaign, accounting for 13 hours 11 minutes of airtime. CBS had the most coverage - 152 stories with 4 hours 57 minutes of airtime, followed by NBC (137 stories, 4 hours 46 minutes) and ABC (112 stories, 3 hours 28 minutes). Campaign coverage is running well below 1988 levels. By February 17, 1988 the networks had aired 755 campaign stories, nearly double the current total of 401. One reason for the drop-off - only 11 stories on the Iowa caucuses this year, compared to 137 four years ago.

Policy issues have been featured twice as frequently as "horse race" speculation, by 42 percent to 20 percent of all stories. At this point in Campaign '88, by contrast, horse race news predominated over issues by 34 percent to 14 percent of all stories. That means policy issues are three times as prominent in this presidential race as they were in the last one (42% of stories now vs. 14% then). But stories on "candidate issues" (scandals, gaffes, etc.) have shown no letup. Led by Bill Clinton's marital and military troubles, they have shown up in 32 percent of all stories, about the same proportion as in 1988.

The Policy Debate

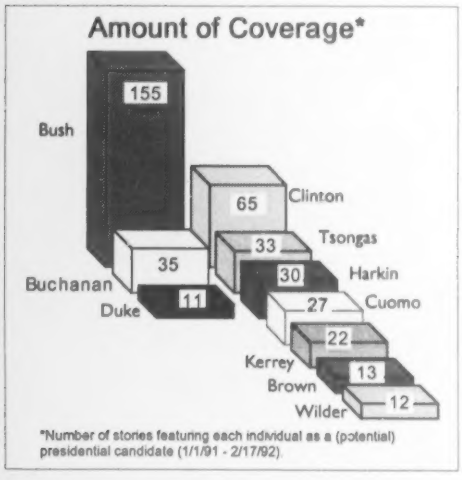
Debate over the recession and taxes has made domestic economic policy the central focus of Campaign '92. Overall, discussions of domestic policy outnumber foreign policy debates by a six-to-one ratio, and two-thirds of the domestic debate concerned economic issues. One in every five election stories has featured a discussion of the economy.

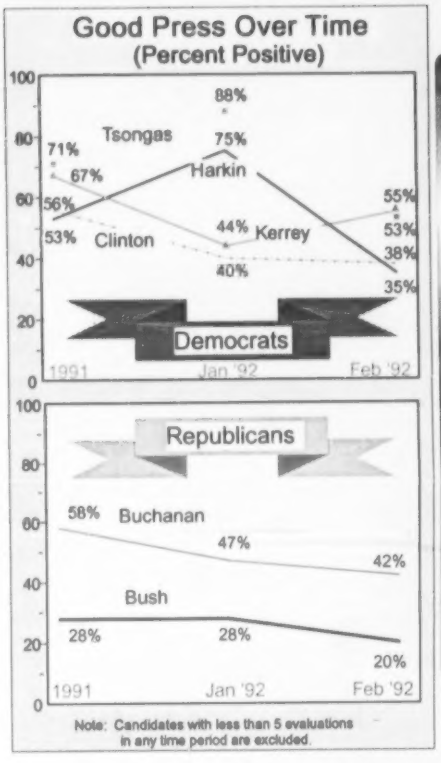
The most frequently debated topic by far (116 sources) was the state of the economy, and the verdict was overwhelmingly (92%) negative. Debate on the overall state of the nation was also gloomy, with four out of five sources (79%) saying the U.S. was facing troubled times. Taxes were the second most frequently featured issue area (32 stories). Sixty-three sources, mainly the candidates, debated tax policy. A strong majority (65%), led by George Bush and Bill Clinton, called for cutting taxes. Only 13 percent called for higher taxes; the other 22 percent argued for leaving tax rates alone. The president's record on taxes came under heavy fire, as 97 percent of sources criticized his tax policies. He fared nearly as badly on his handling of the economy (75% negative). Bush's best issue - the Gulf War - drew little attention, although five out of every six sources (83%) who discussed the war praised his efforts.



Making News

George Bush has been the central figure in the networks' campaign coverage. Bush gained visibility both as the incumbent and as a punching bag for attention-starved Democrats. In 1991, Mario Cuomo drew more stories than any Democrat in the race. A New Hampshire write-in effort helped keep Cuomo's overall coverage above that of both Bob Kerrey and Jerry Brown. It took the Gennifer Flowers scandal to propel a Democrat into the media spotlight. Ironically, the controversies surrounding Clinton kept all other Democrats in the shadows. So far this year, Clinton has been featured in nearly as many stories (52) as his four rivals combined (54). Among Republicans, the late-starting Patrick Buchanan campaign gathered more attention in 1992 than all candidates except Bush and Clinton. In contrast, David Duke - who received a burst of attention when he announced his candidacy in December - has been virtually shut out since then, with only one story in 1992.





Overall Good Press

	Percent Positive	Number of Evaluations
Jerry Brown (D)	70%	20
Paul Tsongas (D)	62%	47
Bob Kerrey (D)	53%	45
Mario Cuomo (D)	52%	54
Tom Harkin (D)	52%	44
Douglas Wilder (D)	50%	10
Pat Buchanan (R)	47%	58
Bill Clinton (D)	41%	90
George Bush (R)	27%	448
David Duke (R)	24%	17

Good Press/Bad Press

To determine how much good and bad press each candidate receives, we note every positive or negative evaluation of his record, policies, personal character, and performance on the campaign trail. The result measures the candidate's perceived desirability, but not his viability. Evaluations of election prospects are calculated separately as "horse race" ratings.

As a group, the Democratic contenders are getting better press than their Republican counterparts--52 percent positive for the Democratic field vs. 29 percent for the Republicans. The main reason is George Bush, who has been the focus of more debate than all his rivals in both parties combined. Nearly three out of every four sources (73%) who evaluated Bush have criticized him. NBC's Lisa Myers observed, "It's tough to lead when you don't know where you want to go. Call it a vision; George Bush doesn't seem to have one." (NBC, 1/28/92) Of all the presidential candidates, only ex-Klansman David Duke (76% negative) received worse press than Bush.

Among the major Democratic contenders, Paul Tsongas has racked up the best overall press score (62% positive). NBC's Andrea Mitchell set the tone with her profile: "What few people realize is that Tsongas is a man with a mission, who has licked tougher odds than he faces this year....[He] has ideas which have already forced the other Democrats to be more substantive in

this campaign." (NBC, 2/5/92) Among the other Democrats, Kerrey, Tom Harkin, and non-candidate Cuomo received balanced coverage, although Harkin faced criticism in February that he was a negative campaigner.

Scandal-scarred Bill Clinton was the only Democrat to receive mainly negative press coverage. Before any allegations of adultery or draft avoidance were aired, Clinton's press was 46 percent positive. Thereafter (from 1/24 through 2/17) it sank to 35 percent positive. Perhaps the most celebrated evaluation of Clinton was Gennifer Flowers' review of his "60 Minutes" interview: "He is absolutely lying." (ABC, 1/27/92) A voter interviewed on NBC two weeks later was even harsher: "If he's going to cheat on his wife, he's going to cheat on America." (NBC, 2/11/92) Still, the Arkansas governor had his share of defenders, such as one woman who emerged from a Clinton speech impressed: "Prior to hearing him . . . I would not have voted for him. After hearing him, I think he expressed in very concrete terms how he cares for people." (ABC, 2/14/92)

Calling the Horse Race

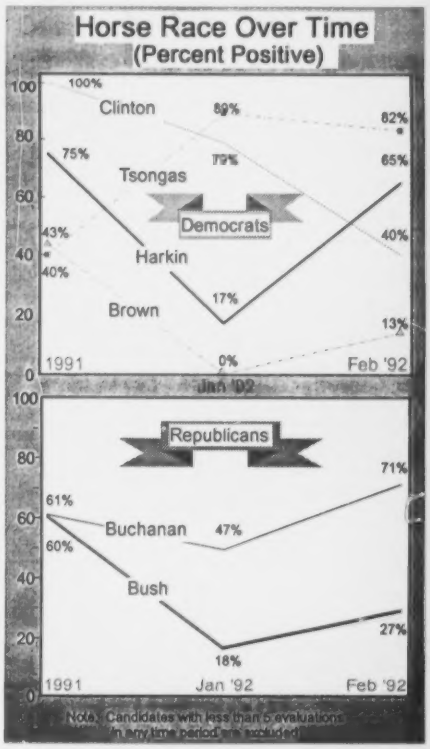
In addition to evaluations of each candidate's desirability, we noted all evaluations of electability, or "horse race" press. The most attention here was directed toward the Tsongas vs. Clinton face-off in New Hampshire. Early favorite Clinton received 100 percent positive horse race press in 1991. His viability ratings dropped to 51 percent positive after the charges of philandering and draft evasion were aired. Conversely, Tsongas started with mostly negative horse race press. His subsequent surge in the polls made him the new media front-runner, and the first candidate this season to receive high marks for both his viability and his desirability--in short, media momentum.

While it received less attention than Tsongas-Clinton, the Bush-Buchanan expectations race was the most surprising. In debating Bush's prospects, the networks gave little notice to polls which showed Bush maintaining a lead over Buchanan in New Hampshire. Rather, they focussed mainly on the president's declining national approval rating, and his prospects for the general election. "President Bush has used the word free-fall in talking about the economy," noted CBS's Susan Spencer. "Free-fall may apply to his popularity as well." (CBS, 1/20/92)

Buchanan, in contrast, was gauged by his ability to embarrass Bush. The frequently-used yardstick was Sen. Eugene McCarthy's 42 percent showing in 1968. By the eve of the primary vote, expectations were more positive for Buchanan than for Bush. As ABC's Brit Hume put it, "Unless all the polls are wrong, Buchanan seems certain to get enough votes here tomorrow to at least go on to other states." NBC's John Cochran added, "If [Buchanan] gets that high [38 to 42 percent], George Bush is seriously embarrassed and is in trouble on Super Tuesday down South." (2/17/92) Such predictions foreshadowed subsequent interpretations of the actual vote.

Overall Horse Race Judgments

	Percent Positive	Number of Evaluations
Paul Tsongas (D)	80%	82
Pat Buchanan (R)	62%	52
Tom Harkin (D)	62%	35
Bill Clinton (D)	59%	112
Mario Cuomo (D)	56%	41
Bob Kerrey (D)	55%	20
David Duke (R)	54%	13
George Bush (R)	47%	243
Jerry Brown (D)	17%	29
Douglas Wilder (D)	0%	7



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Media Monitor

Center for Media and Public Affairs • 2101 L Street, NW • Suite 405 • Washington, D.C. 20037 202-223-2942

Volume VI Number 3 March 1992

The Parties Pick Their Candidates

TV News Coverage of the 1992 Presidential Primaries

How have the media covered the race for the presidential nominations? The Center for Media and Public Affairs is analyzing TV news coverage of the 1992 presidential elections from the 1991 "preseason" reports through the general election in November. This report examines the 424 election stories that appeared on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts from January 1 until the March 17 Michigan and Illinois primaries, when George Bush and Bill Clinton took commanding leads in their races for convention delegates. We also compare current campaign coverage with results from our previous study of the 1988 election.

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Major findings:

■ **More News...** The rate of election news nearly doubled after the New Hampshire primary. But overall coverage still trails 1988 levels. *Page 2*

■ **But Less Substance** After New Hampshire, the horse race replaced the policy debate as the major focus of campaign news. *Page 3*

■ **Read Their Lips** Over 95 percent of sources criticized George Bush's record on taxes. *Page 4*

■ **Press Power Outage** George Bush and Bill Clinton both won despite receiving worse press than their rivals. Bush's coverage has been 76 percent negative, Clinton's 63 percent negative. *Page 3*

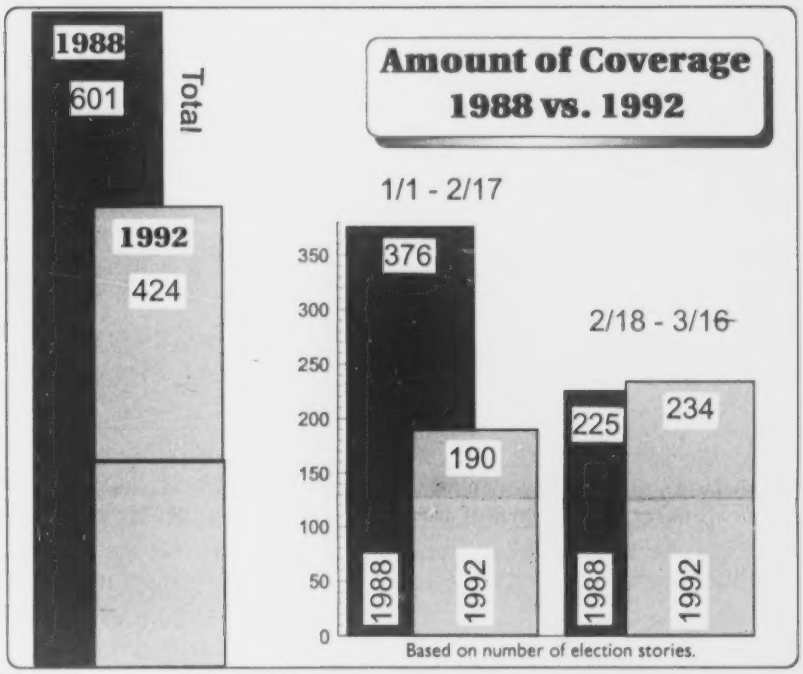
■ **Favorite Sons** Clinton fared best and Bush worst on CBS; Bush fared best and Clinton worst on ABC. *Page 5*

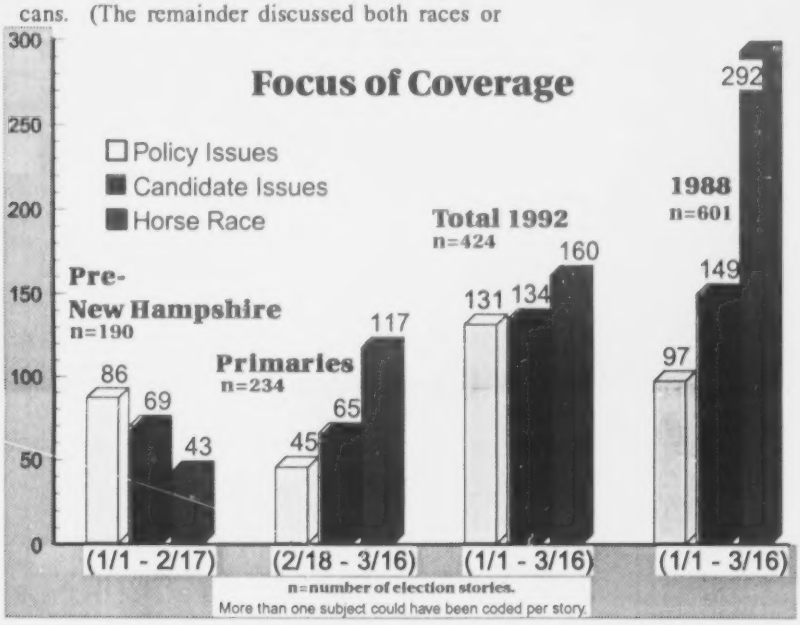
■ **Blaming the Media** Nine out of ten sources criticized the media's role in the campaign. *Page 6*

The networks increased their coverage of the 1992 presidential campaign after the New Hampshire primary, but overall coverage still lags behind 1988 levels. From January 1 through March 16 (the eve of the Midwestern primaries), the three network evening newscasts aired a total of 424 campaign stories, over 14 hours of airtime. ABC broadcast the most stories, 150, but NBC's 141 stories provided more airtime (4 hours 56 minutes to ABC's 4 hours 43 minutes). CBS trailed on both counts, with 133 stories and 4 hours 25 minutes.

By March 16, 1988 the networks had aired more than 600 stories, nearly half again as many as they broadcast this year. With the Iowa caucuses essentially uncontested, pre-New Hampshire coverage was nearly 50 percent lower in 1992 than four years ago. The networks aired only six Iowa stories in 1992, vs. 108 in early 1988.

Prior to New Hampshire, the Democratic race accounted for 45 percent of all campaign stories, compared with 32 percent for the Republicans. (The remainder discussed both races or addressed the campaign without reference to either race.) In the two weeks following New Hampshire, however, coverage of Republicans outpaced that of Democrats (by 43% to 39% of stories) for the only time this year. The reason: Pat Buchanan's "better-than-expected" showing in the New Hampshire primary. This increase in Republican coverage may have deprived Democratic primary winner Paul Tsongas of much of his expected momentum. After the campaign shifted to Super Tuesday and the Midwest, the Democrats received almost twice as much coverage as the Republicans (51% to 26%).





Style and Substance

Compared with 1988 coverage, news of this campaign has been both more substantive and more gossipy. Led by heavy discussion of the economy and taxes, policy discussions are twice as prominent this time, and horse race news is down sharply. But candidate controversies have also drawn a greater share of the coverage, due mainly to allegations levied against Democratic front-runner Bill Clinton. One out of every six campaign stories (70) have included references to the allegations against Clinton, including marital infidelity, draft avoidance, and conflict of interest.

The emphasis on character issues has been a constant throughout the campaign, while coverage of policy issues trailed off as the race heated up after New Hampshire. Prior to New Hampshire, policy issues were the primary focus of campaign news, attracting twice as much atten-

tion as the horse race. But the onset of weekly primaries reversed this ratio. Since New Hampshire, half of all campaign stories have focussed on the horse race, more than double the coverage given to policy issues.

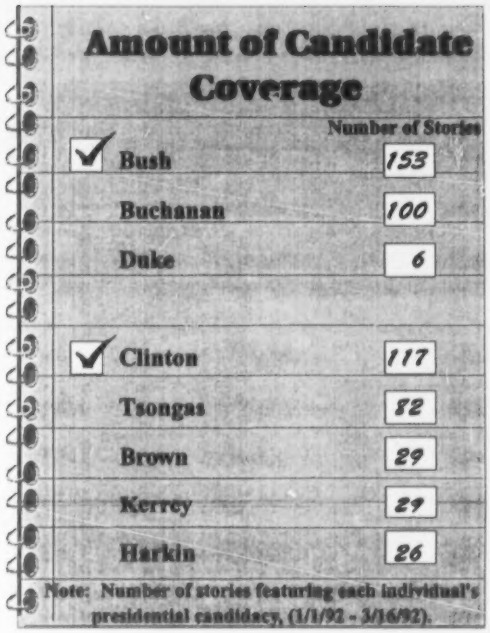
In the Spotlight

George Bush has been the center of attention throughout the 1992 campaign, but Bill Clinton, Pat Buchanan, and Paul Tsongas have narrowed the visibility gap. Most of Buchanan's coverage came after his surprise showing in New Hampshire. For the next two weeks, Buchanan and the president appeared almost equally often (44 Buchanan stories vs. 47 for Bush). During that period Bush and Buchanan **each** attracted more coverage than Clinton and Tsongas combined.

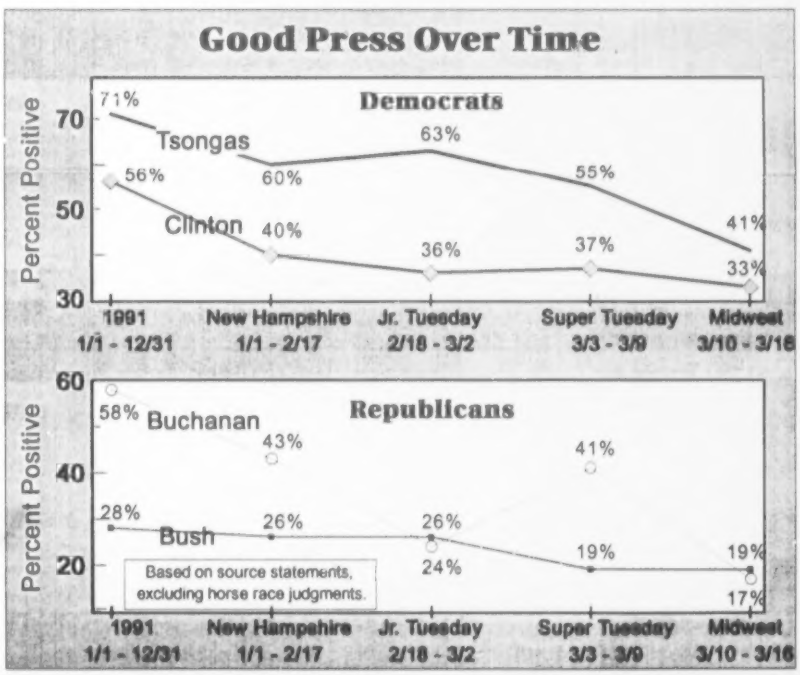
Scandal-scarred Bill Clinton was the most prominent Democrat, although rival Paul Tsongas received roughly equal amounts of coverage following the New Hampshire primary. Despite his improved primary showings, Jerry Brown has yet to achieve the levels of coverage attained by either Tsongas or Clinton. Only by the eve of the Illinois and Michigan primaries did Brown catch up to Bob Kerrey and Tom Harkin in total coverage.

Bad News for Bush

Republicans George Bush and Pat Buchanan vied for the worst press score of all major candidates. With three negative evaluations for each positive comment, Bush's overall 76 percent negative total makes him the frontrunner in the bad press derby, although Buchanan is close behind at 68 percent negative. The president's ratings have been even worse since the March 3 "Junior Tuesday" primaries -- over four-to-one negative. Bush received his worst reviews on CBS, which also gave Buchanan his best press. As a result, Buchanan got twice as much good press on CBS as did Bush (38% vs. 19% positive).



The criticisms that the Republican contenders aimed at each other drove down their level of good press, especially after Super Tuesday, when both received more than 80 percent negative evaluations. The campaign rhetoric is reflected in statements by "partisan" sources (those with an attachment to a candidate, campaign, or political party), from whom both received 76 percent negative press. But among



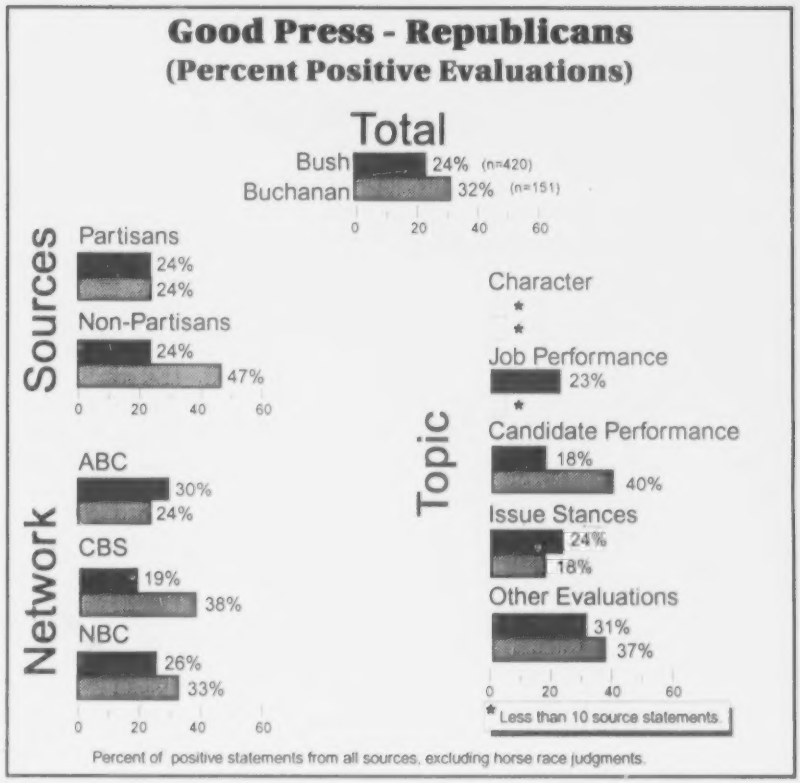
"non-partisan" sources (such as pundits, reporters, and ordinary voters) Bush fared far worse than Buchanan. Bush received equally heavy criticism from these sources (76% negative), while Buchanan was treated to more balanced reviews (47% positive).

Disapproval toward Bush was directed mainly at his record in office, especially on taxes, which drew criticism from 40 out of 42 sources. One voter complained, "Bush has come in and allowed taxes to go up, and the economy's gone down." (CBS, 3/3) The Gulf War was Bush's best issue, although it was far less prominent. As one voter told NBC, "I like the way Bush handles himself. I give him great credit for Desert Storm." (3/2) Overall, the president's domestic record was portrayed more critically than his foreign policy record (83% vs. 57% negative), and domestic issues were the basis of four-fifths of Bush's evaluations.

As the campaign shifted into high gear, Bush was also criticized for his negative ads and the abilities of his campaign team. CBS's Susan Spencer reported after Super Tuesday, "Supporters are relieved that the president has suspended his frantic road trips, but distressed at the ever-plummeting approval ratings. Some blame a campaign still reeling from Pat Buchanan, and one without a consistent, coherent message." (3/12)

Buchanan was also criticized for the tone of his campaign, but was praised for the unexpected effectiveness of his enterprise. Sen. Connie Mack (R-FL) charged, "The message that Pat Buchanan has been giving is a negative, mean-spirited message." (CBS, 3/1) Still, political reporters marvelled at the candidate ABC's Jim Wooten called "a political magician, who turns losing into winning." (ABC, 3/4)

The networks treated Buchanan's issue stands as his Achilles heel. He was criticized for his opposition to the Gulf War and for allegedly espousing racist or anti-Semitic views. Thus, it was a double-edged sword when CBS quoted this endorsement, "Pat Buchanan - I love him! If he gets on the ballot, he's got my vote," from the Exalted Cyclops of the Colorado Ku Klux Klan. (3/3) Voters also questioned the former columnist's experience. "Pat is a great analyst," said one voter, "but I do not think Pat Buchanan would make a good president of the United States." (NBC, 3/2)



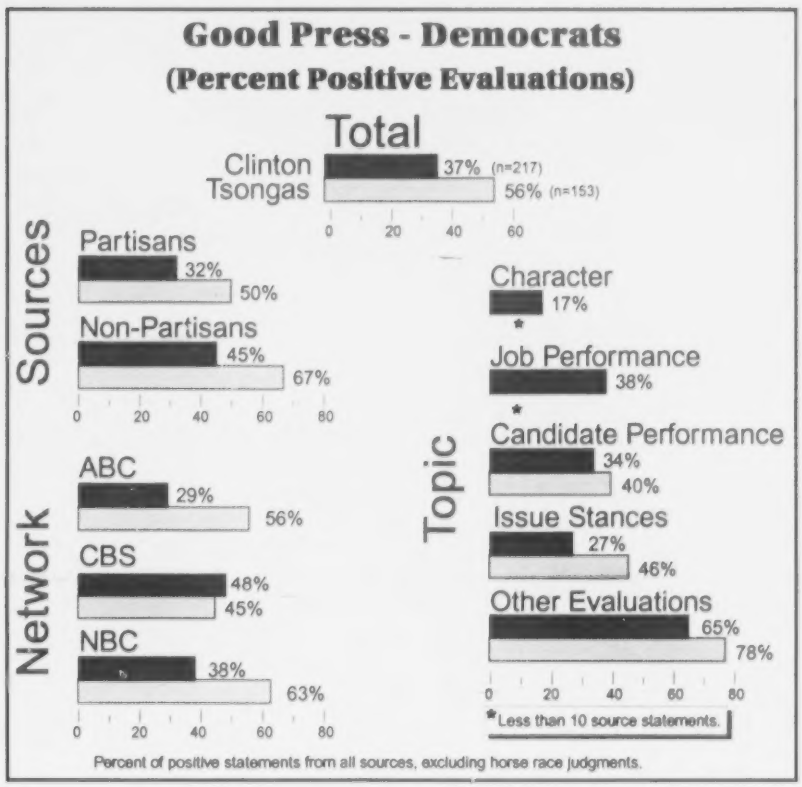
Sex, Lies and Tape at 11

Bill Clinton forged ahead of his rivals despite receiving the worst press of any Democratic candidate. Following allegations in late January of an extramarital affair, Clinton drew more than 60 percent negative press, a score which remained essentially unchanged through Super Tuesday. In contrast, Paul Tsongas enjoyed rave reviews until the final days of the Super Tuesday campaign, when sharp partisan attacks and counterattacks drove his good press below 50 percent for the first time. Reflecting the negative tenor of the campaign, both Clinton and Tsongas fared better among non-partisan sources than among partisans. Nonetheless, a majority of non-partisan comments about Clinton were negative, compared with a two-to-one positive ratio for Tsongas.

As Tsongas sagged, Jerry Brown began to gather his own media momentum with an overall 66

percent positive press score. While Brown was not the focus of enough discussion for a full analysis, he fared best among non-partisan sources (87% positive). Brown did especially well on ABC--76 percent positive, compared to 50 percent on CBS and NBC combined. One Michigan union member raved, "Brown is my man. He's the only person I see that's going to pull us out of this mess." (ABC, 3/16) Nearly all of the negative comments on Brown came from the Clinton camp, in response to Brown's allegations of conflict of interest on the part of Hillary Clinton.

Character questions put much of the tarnish on Clinton's press image. Clinton was the only candidate who received substantial discussion of his character, and five out of every six assessments were critical. In early February, one woman told NBC: "If he's going to cheat on his wife, he's going to cheat on America." (2/11) After Super Tuesday, to illustrate how "character issues" continued to dog Clinton, NBC aired a heckler's catcall: "Hey! Where's Gennifer, you draft-dodging idiot!" (3/16)



Tsongas received his best press for his policy proposals, especially prior to Super Tuesday. One studious voter told ABC, "I really have a lot of confidence in his industrial growth package." (3/4) Even reporters seemed wowed. "The fact is, Paul Tsongas is a serious man, on a serious mission," profiled NBC's Mike Jensen. "Most of what Tsongas says makes sense to economists, even if it's politically risky." (3/4)

The networks differed sharply in their treatment of the major Democratic rivals. Clinton and Tsongas received roughly balanced coverage on CBS, but Tsongas fared far better on ABC and NBC. Clinton's level of good press even dropped below George Bush's on ABC (30% vs. 29%). On the other networks, the president ran far behind all the Democratic contenders in the race for good press.

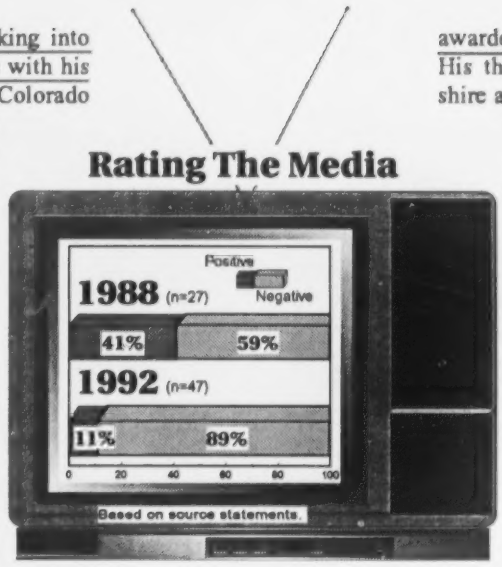
The Expectations Race

The early line on this year's race survived a shake-up in New Hampshire as the pre-season picks recovered their form by Super Tuesday. On the Democratic side, Bill Clinton was widely touted as the early front-runner, with 100 percent positive horse race ratings throughout 1991. Then charges of philandering and draft evasion, coupled with his sharp drop in the polls, injected a pessimistic note to coverage of Clinton's prospects, leaving him with only 53 percent positive horse race news during the New Hampshire race.

Tsongas saw press coverage of his electoral prospects peak during the New Hampshire campaign, when he was seen as the chief beneficiary of Clinton's woes. After New Hampshire, Tsongas kept his prospects afloat with good showings in Maine and Maryland, but the media began to focus on the southern contests where Clinton was expected to win. After his victory in the Georgia primary, the press rediscovered the Arkansan's viability. Between March 3 and March 16, Clinton's horse race score averaged 93 percent positive. Tsongas drifted down to 71 percent positive, and then crashed to just 25 percent positive following his defeat in Florida.

As Tsongas slid, Brown surged, breaking into the media horse race for the first time with his near-win in Maine. His victory in the Colorado primary the following week, coupled with the departures of Kerrey and Harkin, assured Brown of more serious press attention. During the Midwestern primaries, Brown's climb to second place in Michigan boosted his viability ratings at Tsongas's expense.

On the Republican side, Bush's favorable re-election prospects were touted throughout 1991, thanks mainly to the perceived political benefits of the Gulf War. During the New Hampshire campaign, however, the insurgent candidacy of Pat Buchanan, coupled with the recession's persistence, knocked Bush down to just 21 percent positive horse race evaluations. By contrast Buchanan needed only to exceed "expectations" to be awarded media victories in the early primaries. His thirtysomething showings in New Hampshire and Georgia kept the media's portrayal of his prospects favorable until Super Tuesday. After Bush's southern sweep that day, the president's viability ratings recovered, while Buchanan's became more mixed. By March 16, early favorites Bush and Clinton had become favorites once more among the horse race handicappers.

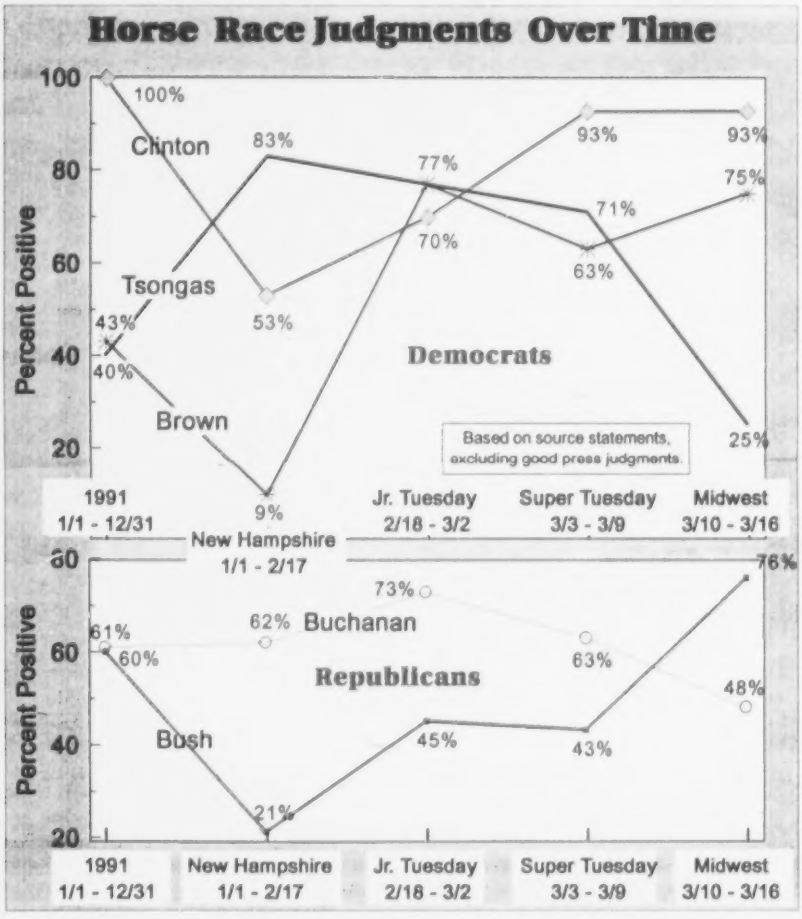


Blame the Messenger

During the 1988 campaign, the *Miami Herald's* stakeout of Democratic front-runner Gary Hart and CBS's aggressive interview of then-Vice President George Bush put the media spotlight directly **on** the media. Overall, a majority (59%) of sources on the network evening news accused the press of behaving irresponsibly during the previous presidential election campaign.

In 1992, the media are back in the spotlight and faring worse than ever. Nine out of ten network news sources have criticized the role of the press in Campaign '92. The media's handling of the Clinton character story has been the prime concern. Reporting the Gennifer Flowers story, CBS's Wyatt Andrews asked whether "the newspapers and networks, including this one, [are] spending too much time scouring bedrooms, while neglecting the more important questions." (1/27) A voter told ABC that "with all the problems New Hampshire's having right now, that to even put something like that on the air is a disgrace." (1/27)

Republicans had their own less-publicized quarrel with the media. Bush supporters questioned whether or not Pat Buchanan was getting a "free ride" in coverage that portrayed him as serious candidate despite his failure to win any primaries or caucuses. Charged Republican whip Newt Gingrich, "The primary backers of the Buchanan campaign are the news media." Added Senator Phil Gramm (R-TX), "The news media are concerned that if they don't have a race to cover that in the midst of a recession that you [reporters] could be out of work." (NBC, 3/10)



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Volume VI Number 4 April 1992

Recession or Recovery?

TV News Coverage of Economic Issues

The economy has become the number one issue for the public, the presidential candidates, and the news media. From December 1991 through March 1992 the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts broadcast 777 economic stories, representing nearly 23 hours of airtime. This month's *Media Monitor* looks at TV news coverage of the economy, with special attention to the trade issue. This issue also updates our continuing analysis of TV news election coverage.

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Major findings:

■ **Big News** The amount of economic news has tripled during the past year; the leading issue is unemployment. *Page 2*

■ **From Worse to Bad** 94 percent of economic evaluations were negative; 97 percent forecast a weak recovery. *Page 2*

■ **CBS Bears Down** On ABC and NBC most forecasts were positive, but on CBS three out of four sources saw more bad times ahead. *Page 3*

■ **Blaming Japan Inc.** Two out of three sources called Japan's trade practices unfair. *Page 4*

■ **Protect and Preserve** Most opinion favored import restrictions over free trade. *Page 5*

Election Update

■ **Clinton's Character** The networks have aired over 100 stories on Bill Clinton's "character issue." But Clinton's media image is on the rise since New York. *Page 6*

Money Matters

The lingering recession and the presidential primaries have made the economy into big news. From December 1, 1991 through March 31, 1992, the three network nightly newscasts aired 777 stories, with a cumulative airtime of 22 hours 50 minutes. That amount of coverage - over six stories per night - tripled TV's economic coverage from a year ago (*Media Monitor*, 5/91). NBC led with 282 stories and 8 hours 53 minutes of airtime, followed by ABC's 275 stories (7 hours 7 minutes), and CBS's 220 (6 hours 50 minutes).

Leading Indicators

With many corporations attempting to streamline their operations, the most frequently mentioned issue was jobs and employment, mentioned in 283 stories. Attention focused on the plight of the unemployed, the job market, changes in the workplace, and a lack of loyalty between companies and their employees.

The second most visible issue was the recession itself, which was mentioned in 169 stories. Mentions of this issue were boosted by election coverage and President Bush's admission in December that the country was in a recession. Taxes were mentioned nearly as frequently (167 stories), including campaign criticism of Bush's broken tax pledge, capital gains taxes, middle class tax cuts and other investment tax incentives.

Mentions of trade placed fourth. The 143 trade-related stories were closely tied to Bush's trip to Asia and expectations of new trade concessions from Japan. The auto industry was the most mentioned economic sector with 108 stories. The high profile of auto executives accompanying Bush on his trip, the General Motors plant closings, and the presidential primary in Michigan all drew attention to the industry. Falling interest rates were mentioned in 98 stories, as the Federal Reserve continued to lower rates. The manufacturing sector was covered in 86 stories, with orders to factories down for most of the time period. Reports on the retail sector (75 stories) closely followed the results of Christmas shopping. Regional economic concerns were involved in 74 stories, boosted by the various primaries that made the economy an election issue. Rounding out the top ten issues were mentions of real estate sales (57 stories).

Issue Mentions		Featured Issues	
Unemployment/Jobs	283	Trade	68
Recession	169	Unemployment/Jobs	61
Taxes	167	Taxes	45
Trade	143	Auto Industry	33
Auto Industry	108	Retail	30
Interest Rates	98	Regional Economies	21
Manufacturing	86	Stock Market	20
Retail	75	Recession	19
Regional Economies	74	Interest Rates	16
Real Estate	57	Quality of U.S. Workforce	17
The number of stories in which each issue was mentioned.		The number of times each issue was the major focus of a story.	

We also noted the number of times each topic was the major focus of an entire story, beyond merely being mentioned. This produced two major changes in the economic news agenda. The trade issue jumped from fourth to first, boosted by the many stories related to President Bush's Asian trip. The focus on trade-related issues was so intense that they are analyzed separately below. Conversely, the recession plummeted from second to eighth place. Its frequent mentions usually provided a backdrop to stories that targeted some specific aspect of the country's economic woes, rather than the general phenomenon of a recession.

Bearish on America

Evaluations of America's economic health were almost entirely negative. Of the 642 assessments of the overall economy or one of its major sectors, 94 percent were negative.

Evaluations of the economy in general were the most negative, with 97 percent of sources expressing pessimistic views.

Few sectors fared much better. Criticism of transit systems around the country made assessments of the transportation sector (excluding the auto and airline industries) 100 percent negative. The auto and construction industries both received negative ratings from nine out of ten sources. The condition of the workforce was rated almost as poorly (89% negative). The manufacturing sector, suffering from decreasing orders for new goods, was rated unhealthy by 88 percent of sources. The retail sector was deprecated by four out of five sources. The only positive assessments went to discount stores, which were showing profits while other retailers suffered. Finally, three out of four sources rated the real estate sector negatively.

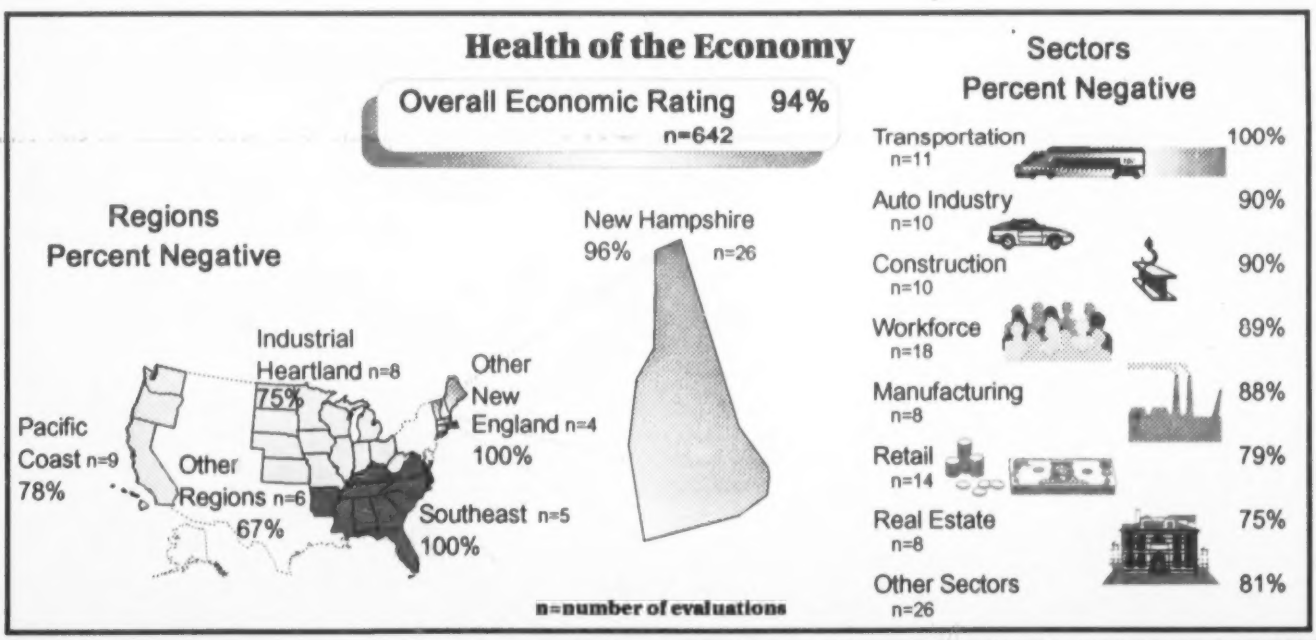
Portrayals of geographic regions were as downbeat as those of economic sectors. New England was evaluated more than all other geographic regions combined. Out of 30 assessments of economic conditions there, 29 were negative (97%). Intensive coverage of the New Hampshire primary accounted for most of these. One New Hampshire voter complained "I think we're more in a depression than we are in a recession. I mean with all these people losing their houses. If you look in the papers, my God, the foreclosures!" (ABC, 1/13/92)

The outlook in other regions was portrayed as little or no better. In fact, opinions on the Southeast were 100 percent negative. The Pacific Coast region received 78 percent negative coverage, and the industrial heartland (the north central and midwestern states) received ratings that were 75 percent negative. An unemployed Lockheed worker saw the current situation in California as especially grim: "You ought to recognize that in California, we have a depression, not a recession." (ABC, 1/29/92)

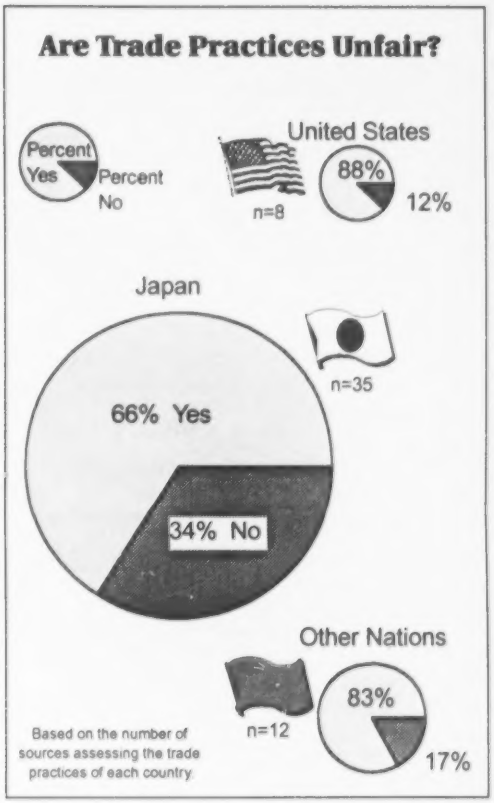
Prosperity Is Just...

A majority of sources (54%) foresaw more hard times ahead. Nonetheless, assessments of the future were consistently more positive than those of the present, and the divergence grew over time. During December three out of four economic projections were negative. In January a slight majority of forecasts were hopeful, and in February and March combined, over 90 percent were sanguine.

The economic picture appeared equally dreary on all three networks. The word "recession" was uttered by reporters 260 times, an average of more than twice a day. Prospects for the future appeared more diverse, depending upon

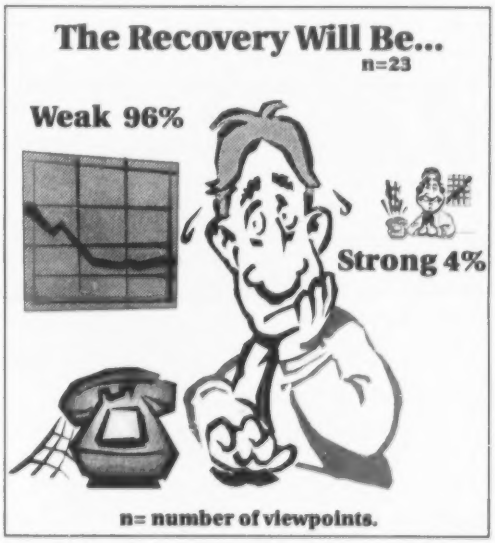


which network held the crystal ball. Nearly three out of four sources on CBS (74%) took a dim view of the nation's economic prospects. (This replicates our finding of a year ago, when CBS also presented the most pessimistic news about the future of the economy.) For example, an auto industry analyst told Ray Brady, "Detroit is a dying industry," and predicted that the "big three" auto makers "are going the way of the consumer electronics - the VCR, the television." (1/6/92) By contrast, most sources expressed optimism on ABC (56% positive) and NBC (62% positive). As one economist told ABC, "For the last several months, we've seen a flickering light at the end of the tunnel. Now we see a blazing torch." (3/17/92)



...Around What Corner?

Even most sources who forecast a recovery were extremely guarded in their optimism. Ninety-six percent agreed that the recovery would be weak or slow to develop. Typical was the assessment of a Merrill Lynch financial analyst, "The fact that the recession is over doesn't mean that happy days are here again. The recovery is likely to be the weakest recovery we've ever had in the United States." (NBC, 3/6/92) An economist expressed similar reservations in more colorful terms, "The ship of state has been hit by a torpedo and the best we can do is keep the ship from sinking at the present time. We will not get back on course for a long time. Perhaps not until late 1992 or early '93." (ABC, 12/28/91)



Trading Charges

One of the biggest economic stories was George Bush's trade mission to Japan and our other Asian trading partners. Coverage of the trip added greatly to the discussion of trade-related issues. The accompanying debate revolved around allegations of unfair trading practices and efforts to assess responsibility for the trade imbalance between Japan and the United States.

When the president and his entourage of corporate executives travelled to Japan, that country's trade practices became the focus of the debate. Two out of three sources claimed that Japan's trade practices were unfair. For example, Sen. Bob Kerrey (D-NE) told NBC, "They have mercantilist, protectionist policies that make it difficult not just for us to sell into their market place, but for the rest of the world to survive as well." (1/20/92)

While Japanese trade restrictions were the most frequently criticized, U.S. policies were rarely defended. Seven out of eight sources accused the United States of unfair practices. For example, ABC's Diane Sawyer summarized the complaints of protesters during President Bush's visit to Australia, "They say that American farm subsidies make U.S. wheat so cheap that Australian farmers can't compete in the world markets." (12/31/91)

Moreover, the United States itself was held to be responsible for its trade deficit. Seven out of eight sources attributed the trade imbalance to America's own failings. A majority of this criticism (57%) was directed toward U.S. industries and their management. John Chancellor summarized Japanese opinion in a commentary, "They say American cars, made by workers in the U.S. under American management, don't sell well in Japan and are losing market share even in the U.S. But Japanese cars, they say, made by workers in the U.S. with Japanese management, are gaining market share. Conclusion: Bad American management is the problem..." (NBC, 1/12/92)

There was also a broader policy debate over whether the government should step in to protect American industry. Three out of five sources argued for restrictions on imports in order to compensate for other countries' restrictive trading practices. House majority leader Richard Gephardt (D-MO) proposed, "If they make it difficult to get our cars into Japanese auto dealerships, then let's make it hard for them to get their cars into dealerships, so they face exactly a mirror image of what they're doing to us." (CBS, 12/3/91) George Bush, however, presented the issue differently, "If we want to put people to work here at home, we've got to expand trade and to open markets." (ABC, 12/30/91)

"The economy is a wreck."

-Jim Wooten
ABC, 1/13/92

"The economy is going nowhere fast."

-Allen Sinai
Economist
CBS, 12/17/91

The Personal Touch

The networks personalized economic news by offering 176 anecdotes in feature stories about companies, families, and individuals. More than a third of these anecdotes were presented as part of the networks' special segments, such as ABC's "American Agenda," CBS's "The Money Crunch," and NBC's "Daily Difference." The outlook presented in these individual cases, while mixed, was more upbeat than the overall negative pattern of economic news might suggest. Overall, two out of five anecdotes were positive in tone. But this total masks a sharp distinction in features about business, which were mainly positive, and those about individuals, which were highly negative.

Five out of eight anecdotal treatments of businesses (62%) were success stories, often describing how individual companies were bucking a downward trend. For example, on January 14 ABC profiled a Massachusetts discount mall that found a ready market among recession-ravaged consumers. A shopper commented that "People are really hurting and it's great to have a place like this that you can come to and afford." Reporter James Walker concluded, "this is one mall where customers believe the price is right."

In contrast, 71 percent of the individuals and families who were profiled were victims of hard times. For example, on February 17 ABC visited Brad and Dee Morgan of Derry, New Hampshire. Peter Jennings explained that they were about to lose their home, "because of skyrocketing property taxes." Jennings concluded from the Morgans' plight, "It is very easy to see this winter that the American dream is more elusive for more people."

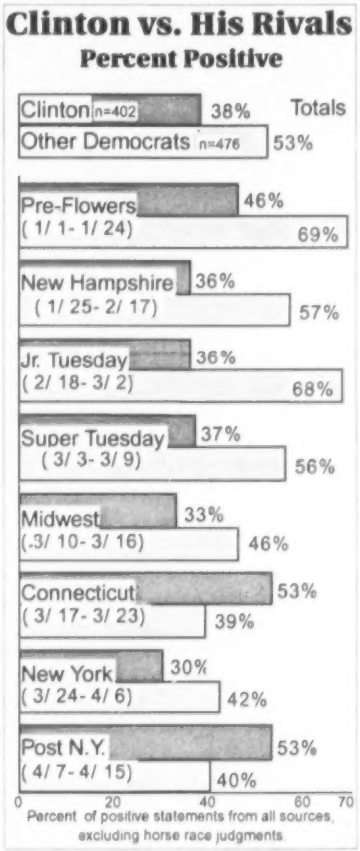
From January 1 through April 15, the networks devoted over 600 stories and nearly 20 hours of coverage to the presidential race. ABC broadcast the most stories, 218, but NBC's 211 stories provided more airtime (7 hours 14 minutes, compared to ABC's 6 hours 40 minutes). CBS trailed with 172 stories and just 5 hours 33 minutes of airtime.

The coverage has focused more on personality than policy. One out of every three campaign stories (197) has featured candidate controversies, with the most attention going to questions surrounding Bill Clinton's character. Less than three out of ten stories - 173 in all - have dealt with policy issues, and half of those appeared prior to the New Hampshire primary. Since then, only one in five campaign stories have discussed public policy.

Questions of Character

Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton has been featured in 207 network news stories, making him the most visible political personality of 1992 after President Bush. A majority of those stories, however, raised questions about Clinton's character. Since Gennifer Flowers alleged that she and Clinton shared a lengthy affair, the networks have run 105 stories dealing with Clinton's character or personal behavior. Four out of five (83) mentioned specific allegations; another 22 stories dealt with the "character issue" as an impediment to Clinton's election.

Draft evasion and adultery were the most frequently cited (44 and 43 stories, respectively), together accounting for nearly two-thirds of the allegations made against Clinton. Conflict of interest surrounding Hillary Clinton's law firm was the next most prominent charge (12 stories), followed by stories about Clinton's college drug use (10 stories). ABC provided the most coverage of Clinton's foibles (42 stories) and CBS the least (26). NBC aired 37 stories. A majority of those allegations were stated by network reporters without attribution or were attributed to reports in other media outlets. One story in eight depicted rival campaigns as a source behind the allegations. Only about half the "character" the stories (51%) included a response from Clinton or his surrogates.

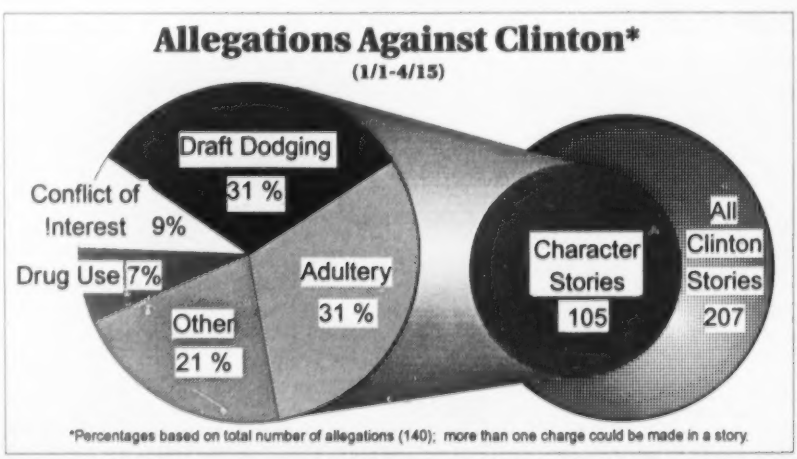


Clinton vs. His Rivals
Percent Positive

With Friends Like These...

Despite widespread belief that Clinton is the personal favorite of many journalists, the allegations helped to keep his level of good press lower than that of his opponents throughout most of the primary season. As a group, Clinton's Democratic rivals garnered more praise than criticism (53% positive evaluations). Clinton's chief rival through Super Tuesday, Paul Tsongas, averaged 60 percent positive press over the course of the campaign. Jerry Brown has fared worse than Tsongas, but even his 41 percent positive press score was higher than Clinton's 38 percent positive.

Only after apparently clinching the nomination with victories in Illinois and Michigan did Clinton receive more good press than bad. That brief honeymoon ended abruptly with his surprise defeat in Connecticut the following week. Clinton took his worst punishment during the two-week New York campaign, when seven out of ten sources criticized him. But his New York victory has provided Clinton with his second spurt of positive press.



Allegations Against Clinton*
(1/1-4/15)

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Volume VI Number 4 May 1992

Diagnosing the Health Care Crisis

Media Prognoses and Prescriptions for Health Care in America

Health issues have long been a leading topic of TV news, and health care has become a major campaign issue in the 1992 elections. This month's *Media Monitor* analyzes TV news coverage of the debate over health care in America, including coverage of the AIDS epidemic and the controversy over silicone breast implants. From November 1991 through April 1992 the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts broadcast 386 stories with a combined airtime of 12 hours 25 minutes. This issue also includes an update of our continuing analysis of TV news election coverage.

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Major findings:

■ **AIDS Blitz** AIDS received four times as much coverage as any other health care topic. *Page 2*

■ **TV vs. Reality** TV portrayals of AIDS patients underrepresented gays, minorities, and I.V. drug users. *Page 4*

■ **A Sick System** Six out of seven sources criticized the quality of health care in America, and four out of five feature stories portrayed failures of the system. *Page 2*

■ **Strong Medicine** Three out of four sources criticized the private sector, and two out of three called for a national health insurance system. *Page 3*

Election '92 Update:

■ **Goodbye Clinton** Since early May, Bill Clinton has received less network coverage than Ross Perot. *Page 6*

■ **Hello Perot** TV news has portrayed Perot as a more viable and desirable candidate than either Clinton or Bush. *Page 6*

The Nation's Chart

Harris Wofford's (D-PA) triumph over Richard Thornburgh in the Pennsylvania Senate race put health care reform on the national agenda, just in time for the 1992 elections. During the six months from November 1991 through April 1992, the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts broadcast 386 stories in issues related to health care with a combined airtime of 12 hours 25 minutes.

Top Ten Issues Mentioned

U.S.A.

AIDS	156
Silicone Breast Implants	40
Private Insurance	28
Taxes	23
Children's Health	22
Euthanasia	21
Cancer	15
Government Regulation of Drugs	14
Medicare/Medicaid	13
Rising Cost of Health Care	12

The number of stories in which each issue was mentioned.

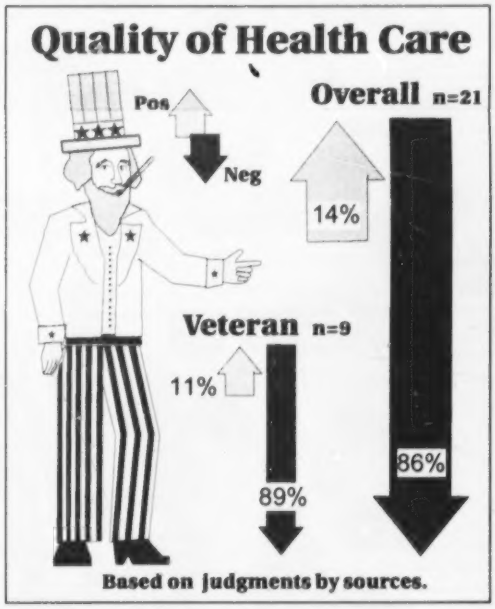
The leading health care topic, with about four times as much coverage (156 stories) as any other, was the battle against AIDS. Earvin "Magic" Johnson's November 7 announcement that he was HIV-positive unleashed a flood of stories, frequently involving public information campaigns and educational outreach programs. Second on the health care news agenda, with 40 stories, was the controversy over the safety of silicone breast implants. The high cost and inaccessibility of private health insurance contributed 28 stories. Tax-related issues were mentioned 23 times, including various proposals for individual tax credits and corporate tax incentives to provide health insurance. The problem of assuring adequate health care for the nation's children rounded out the top five topics with 22 mentions.

Other frequently mentioned issues included the debate over the right to die, often linked to news about Dr. Jack Kevorkian's suicide machine (21 stories), the ongoing battle against cancer (15), government regulation and testing of experimental drugs (14), proposed modifications to Medicare/Medicaid (13), and the rising cost of health care (12).

Prognosis...Poor

The media prognosis for the nation's health care woes was uniformly negative. Out of 21 evaluations of the quality of health care in America, all but four (86%) were critical. For example, Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) told CBS, "Institutionalized racism in the area of health care in general exacerbates the problem of little or no services dealing with this problem of AIDS." (3/25/92) The heaviest dose of criticism concerned the quality of health care available to veterans. For example, CBS reporter Jim Stewart cited unnamed experts as charging that, "the technology provided to the wounded Persian Gulf veterans was horrifyingly inept." (1/15/92)

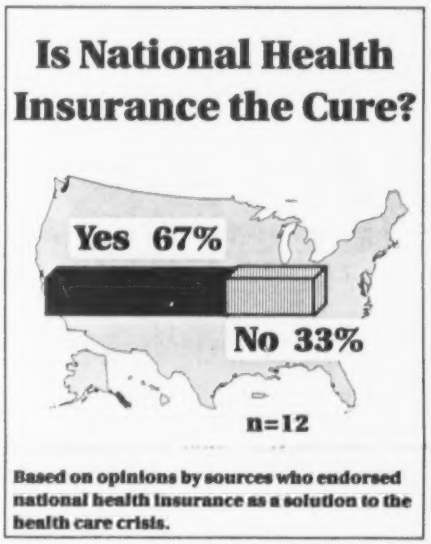
Opinions on the adequacy of federal funding for various aspects of health care were even harsher -- 100 percent negative. Thus, CBS reporter



Richard Threlkeld reported, "AIDS researchers say Washington is not devoting nearly enough money nor effort to finding a cure." (CBS, 11/8/91) Similarly, the president of the American Heart Association complained on ABC, "We're not spending enough money on heart disease and stroke... where dollars could benefit next year thousands and thousands of people." (ABC, 11/10/91) The private sector also fared poorly. Three out of four evaluations of private sector handling of health care were negative. For example, ABC's George Strait reported, "Many hospitals express anger and frustration at what they call the drug industry's arrogant refusal to moderate price increases." (2/4/92)

We also looked at the increasing costs of health care and health insurance. The cost of health care was judged to be too high by 94 percent of sources. For example, Irving R. Levine concluded, "Medical costs are rising out of control and are putting health care beyond the reach of more and more Americans. Not only poor Americans, but those considered middle class as well." (NBC, 12/30/91) Insurance costs were rated as overly high by all nine sources who expressed an opinion.

When remedies for the nation's health care problems were proposed, the discussion frequently turned to national health care plans. Two thirds of the sources who offered opinions on a national health care system favored some such plan. For example, Iowa Senator (and then presidential candidate) Tom Harkin called for the government to "invest in the human resources of education and a national health insurance program, and then things will start to get better." (CBS, 11/25/91).


Is National Health Insurance the Cure?
Yes 67%
No 33%
n=12
Based on opinions by sources who endorsed national health insurance as a solution to the health care crisis.

No Magic Cure

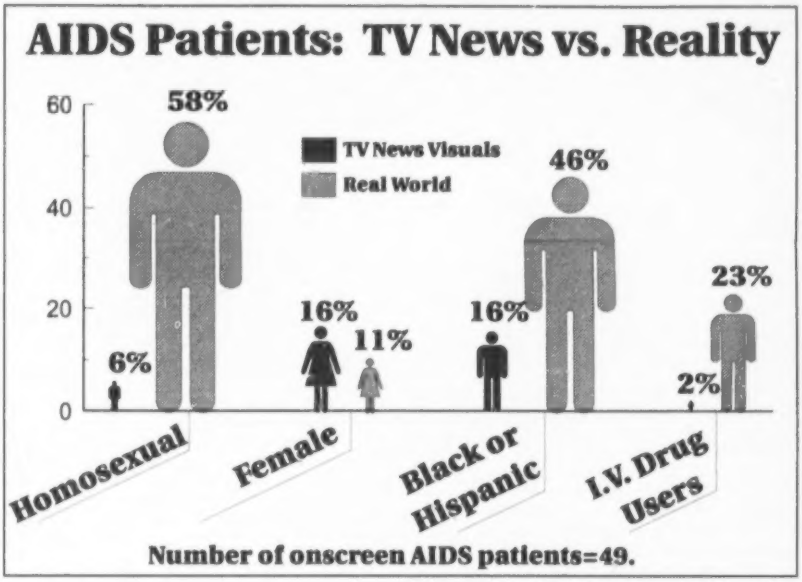
Magic Johnson's announcement renewed the debate over education efforts aimed at preventing the spread of the AIDS virus. The two most frequently debated methods were the teaching or practice of safe sex, including the use of condoms, and the teaching or practice of abstinence or fidelity. Safe sex education was

widely debated and usually endorsed. Out of 30 opinions that were voiced, 73 percent supported this option. Even Wilt Chamberlain, the former basketball star who related his sexual exploits in a recent book, joined the chorus: "This is the '90's and AIDS is real and we must be much more selective and we have to practice safe sex." (NBC, 11/8/91)

Abstinence and fidelity received even higher approval ratings (83%) but far less discussion (12 opinions). Supporters of teaching abstinence included a representative from the Family Research Council who told NBC, "The young people of America need to hear very clearly from us that the only way to completely avoid the risk of getting the HIV virus is to delay their sexual activity until they're ready for marriage." (11/9/91)

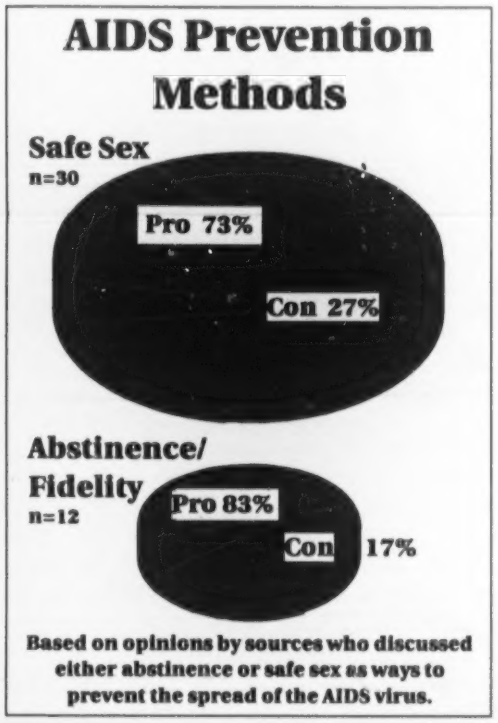
AIDS On Camera

Television communicates through the visual images as well as the words that it conveys. To find out what impressions of AIDS victims the camera conveyed, we noted the backgrounds of all identified AIDS patients who appeared on TV news, using only information provided in the broadcast. We then compared the traits of TV's visual victims with real world data on AIDS victims compiled by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in their Quarterly Surveillance Report through March 1992.



The results: TV's visual portrait of AIDS victims has little in common with real life. The CDC's reported rate of AIDS among blacks and Hispanics is nearly three times the rate of victims identified on television (46% vs. 16%). Ironically, former tennis star Arthur Ashe's unwilling appearances accounted for half of all visuals of minority AIDS victims. (This comparison excludes Magic Johnson, who was diagnosed as HIV-positive but has not contracted AIDS.) Similarly, only six percent of on-camera AIDS patients were identified as homosexuals, compared to 58 percent of real world AIDS victims. This disparity reflects the fact that the networks rarely identified the means of AIDS transmission to the individuals who were shown.

Another group of AIDS victims who were underrepresented in TV visuals consisted of intravenous drug users. In real life, nearly one in four AIDS sufferers contracted the disease through drug use. But only two percent of those shown on television were identified as drug users. By contrast, one group was somewhat overrepresented in relation to real world



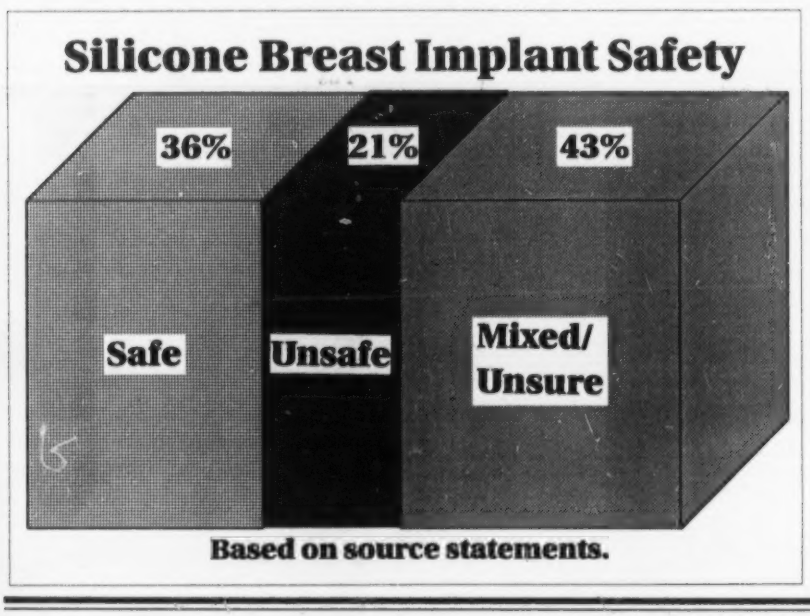
AIDS incidence. Women accounted for 16 percent of those shown on television, compared to eleven percent of AIDS victims in real life.

Thus, the risk groups the news audience sees are very different from their real world counterparts. This repeats the pattern we discovered in our previous study of AIDS coverage five years ago (*Media Monitor*, December 1987). At that time TV visuals also vastly underrepresented the incidence of AIDS among homosexuals, minority groups, and drug users, and overrepresented the proportion of women with the disease.

Silicone Scare

After AIDS education, the most heavily debated issue in health care news was the safety and future of silicone breast implants. Thirty-six percent of sources judged the implants to be safe, compared to 21 percent who declared them unsafe. But a plurality of all sources (43%) argued that the safety of the implants was still unclear or unknown.

A majority of the sources who defended the implants as safe were representatives of Dow-Corning, the leading manufacturer of the silicone implants. Typical of these was a corporate spokesman who declared, "We believe that these products are needed, safe, and effective." (CBS, 11/13/91) A majority of those who criticized implants as unsafe were women who had experienced ill effects. For example, one woman told CBS, "I think they're extremely dangerous. And I think eventually over a certain period of time, whether it be a few years or ten years or 20 years a woman is going to develop an adverse reaction to her implants." (4/16/92)



The Personal Health Beat

The networks personalized the health care debate by including 102 anecdotes about the experiences of individuals in dealing with the American health care system. Overall, these anecdotes produced a downbeat portrait. Sixty-three percent showed patients, families, or companies faring poorly in their interaction with the health care system.

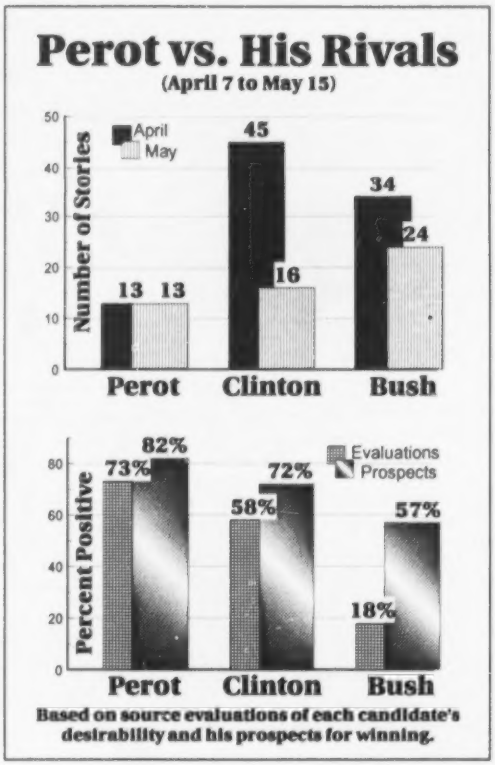
Much of the bad news concerned the workings of the current system of private insurance. Out of 33 anecdotes that illustrated the workings of this system or the dealings of individuals with private companies, 79 percent showed negative experiences. For example, NBC's Robert Hager reported on one family's problems with private health insurance as they responded to President Bush's State of the Union address. Hager introduced the family, "Dave and Kristin Bravocoln had high stakes in the president's address; they're among 35 million Americans who have no health insurance. The Bravocoln's have three children. David's small firm, hit hard by the recession, makes the family about $28,000 a year." Kristin spoke first, "If anything happens to David, we don't have either health insurance or disability insurance." David added, "At this point in time we simply can't afford it, because it is so expensive." Kristin then explained her choices, "I can't get a strep culture done without not paying a bill or taking it out of groceries. There are decisions like that, that we are making, and I think they are wrong." The effect of such anecdotes was to dramatize the individual suffering that underlies statistics on failures of the health care system.

Election '92: The Perot Factor

The nominations are no longer in doubt, but the volume of election news has hardly abated since the New York primary. From April 7 to May 15, the three major network evening news shows have aired 160 election stories totalling 4 hours 52 minutes of airtime. This rate of coverage is down only slightly from the yearlong average of about 30 stories and one hour of airtime per week. Year-to-date totals: 716 stories and nearly 23 hours.

The riots in Los Angeles sparked an increase in issue coverage. From the New Hampshire primary until the start of the riots, fewer than one election story in four (23%) contained substantive discussions of policy issues. In the days after L.A., however, two out of three stories did so. Leading the way were discussions of urban policy, which appeared in more than a third (35%) of all election stories. Race relations and crime also received enhanced attention during this period.

The shift in election coverage mirrors a broader shift in the overall network news agenda. In April, 35 network stories focused on race relations. From May 1 to May 15, the networks aired 141 such stories, an eight-fold increase in the rate of coverage.



Enter Ross Perot

The past few weeks have seen a dramatic increase in visibility for prospective candidate Ross Perot. Prior to the New York primary, the networks ran just six stories featuring Perot. Since April 7, they have aired 26 Perot stories, half on NBC and the remainder split between ABC and CBS. George Bush and Bill Clinton have garnered about twice as much coverage as Perot during that period. Since the Los Angeles riots ended, however, the networks have devoted more airtime to news about Perot (28 minutes) than Clinton (27 minutes).

Perot's rise to prominence has been accompanied by a burst of good press. Nearly three out of every four evaluations of Perot (73%) have been positive. This positive tone has predominated on all three networks and among both partisan and non-partisan sources (the latter are sources not linked with candidates or political parties). Perot received his most favorable press from sources discussing his character and his record as a businessman. As one voter enthused on ABC: "He's consistent, he's honest, he's diligent, he's a doer." (5/11) Criticism predominated only on his issue positions (60% negative). NBC's Lisa Myers complained, "Trying to pin down Perot on specifics is like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall." (5/6)

Meanwhile, evaluations of Clinton have been 58 percent positive since New York, his best showing of the campaign. Bush's level of good press has dropped to just 18 percent positive, his worst showing to date.

The networks have also depicted Perot as the most formidable of the presidential contenders. Overall, Perot's "horse race" coverage (based on evaluations of his prospects) was 82 percent positive, compared to 72 percent positive for Clinton, and just 57 percent positive for Bush. When references to prospects in the remaining primaries were excluded from Clinton's and Bush's totals, they dropped to only 46 and 44 percent positive, respectively. Thus, Perot is the only candidate who is getting a majority of positive evaluations with regard to his chances in the ultimate "horse race" - the general election.

In sum, Bush has maintained high visibility but has also continued to attract heavy criticism. Clinton has improved the tone of his coverage at the cost of losing the spotlight. Only Perot has conveyed an image of visibility, desirability and viability this spring.

Media Monitor

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Media Monitor

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Volume VI Number 6 June/July 1992

Abortion Rights and Wrongs

Media Coverage of the Abortion Debate 1991-92

How have the media covered the emotional debate over abortion? We analyzed 224 print and broadcast news stories that ran from May 1, 1991 through May 31, 1992, as advocates anticipated a major Supreme Court decision that would narrow the scope of Roe v. Wade. Our study included 187 stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news shows, along with 37 stories in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*. The results are compared with our previous study of abortion coverage in 1989. Also in this issue: Final data on TV's coverage of the 1992 primaries, and an update on President Bush's declining TV image.

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Major findings:

■ **Gender Gap** In stories reported by men, most opinions quoted were pro-life. In stories reported by women, most opinions were pro-choice. *Page 4*

■ **Change of Heart?** Overall pro-life sentiments outnumbered pro-choice views by 57 percent to 43 percent. In 1989 a majority of opinions in the news were pro-choice. *Page 4*

■ **Faces in the Crowd** Pro-choice activists were quoted more often then pro-life activists. But the most frequently quoted group was Operation Rescue. *Page 2*

■ **What's in a Name?** On television the two sides were called "abortion rights" and "anti-abortion" groups. In print they were called "pro-choice" and "pro-life". *Page 3*

Election '92 Update

■ **Sound Nibbles** The average length of a "sound bite" by presidential candidates dropped from 9.8 seconds in 1988 to 7.3 seconds in 1992. *Page 5*

■ **From Bad to Worse** Overall coverage of the candidates was more negative in 1992 than in 1988. *Page 5*

The Abortion Story

From May 1, 1991 through May 31, 1992, we analyzed news coverage of the abortion issue by counting all sources quoted, opinions presented, and labels applied to the two sides of the debate. Newsworthy events included three sets of demonstrations - the high profile Operation Rescue demonstrations in Wichita, pro-life demonstrations in Buffalo, and the annual activities by both sides on the anniversary of Roe v. Wade. Attention also focussed on the Supreme Court over its finding that abortion counselling could be prohibited in federally funded facilities, its anticipated ruling on Pennsylvania's restrictive abortion law, and the Clarence Thomas nomination battle.

We examined 224 news stories on abortion that appeared on the major television networks and weekly newsmagazines during this period. These included 187 stories with combined airtime of 6 hours 14 minutes on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news shows, and 37 stories in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. There was little variation in the amount of coverage by individual networks or magazines.

Top Mentioned Topics

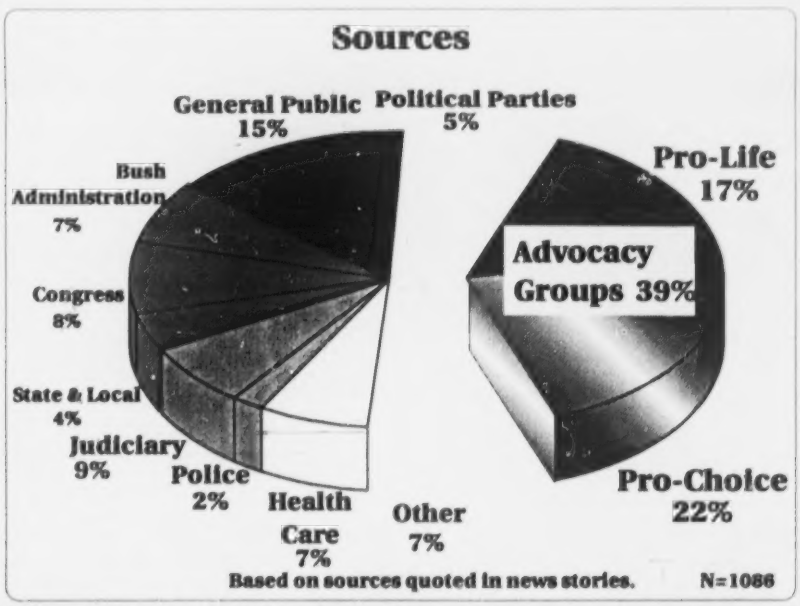
	Stories
1) Demonstrations	105
Pro-Life 97	
Pro-Choice 41	
2) Supreme Court	68
3) History	47
4) Federal Funding	37
5) Pennsylvania Case	36
6) Criminal Cases	35
7) Review of Legal Status	31
8) Litigation	14
9) Abortion Alternatives	13
10) State Interest In Regulation	13

The number of stories in which each topic was mentioned.

Blockades and Stockades

Demonstrations, marches, and protests received the most attention with 105 mentions. Pro-life demonstrations generated 97 mentions and pro-choice actions 41; many stories mentioned both. The Clarence Thomas nomination made the Supreme Court itself (apart from specific rulings) the second most frequently mentioned issue (68). Concerns over the fate of Roe v. Wade put the history of the debate in third place (47 mentions). The Supreme Court ruling that federal funding to clinics was not a constitutional right put the funding question in fourth place with 37 mentions, closely followed by mentions of the Pennsylvania case (36).

Rounding out the top ten were mentions of criminal cases related to the arrests and trials of protestors (35), reviews of the legal status of abortion (31), other litigation (14), and finally, discussion of abortion alternatives (13) and mentions of a state's right to regulate abortion (13).



Whose Views?

The most frequently heard voices, representing nearly two-fifths (39%) of all sources, were pro- and anti-abortion rights activists. Advocates from the pro-choice side were quoted 239 times, while pro-life activists were heard 186 times. Leading pro-choice sources included Planned Parenthood (35), NARAL (19), and representatives of Republicans for Choice (11) and the ACLU (11). Among pro-life groups, the standout was Operation Rescue with 58 citations (17 from its leader Randall Terry), followed by National Right to Life, with only 12 citations. The pro-life side also benefitted from the high media profile of its ally, George Bush, who was quoted 28 times on this issue.

Naming Names

Abortion activists usually identified themselves as either "pro-choice" or "pro-life", but reporters frequently chose other terms. Overall, reporters assigned the "abortion rights" label 51 percent of the time, compared to 47 percent designating the "pro-choice" label and two percent "pro-abortion". On the other side, reporters used the "anti-abortion" label 68 percent of the time and "pro-life" or "right-to-life" 32 percent.

Television reporters usually identified the two sides as "abortion rights" (62%) and "anti-abortion" advocates (86%). This represents a major change from our previous study of this topic (*Media Monitor*, 10/89) in which "Roe" supporters were usually (74%) labelled as "pro-choice", while opponents were almost always (94%) called "anti-abortion". By contrast, magazine reporters chose "pro-choice" (67%) and "pro-life" (61%) as the most frequent labels.

Terms of Debate

The distribution of opinion in the media depended upon how the issue was raised. Pro-choice views dominated when arguments focused on a woman's right to obtain an abortion. Sixty-seven percent of sources agreed that women should have this right. Example: "I don't believe we can be one country until we respect a woman's right to choose." (Bill Clinton, ABC, 4/19/92)

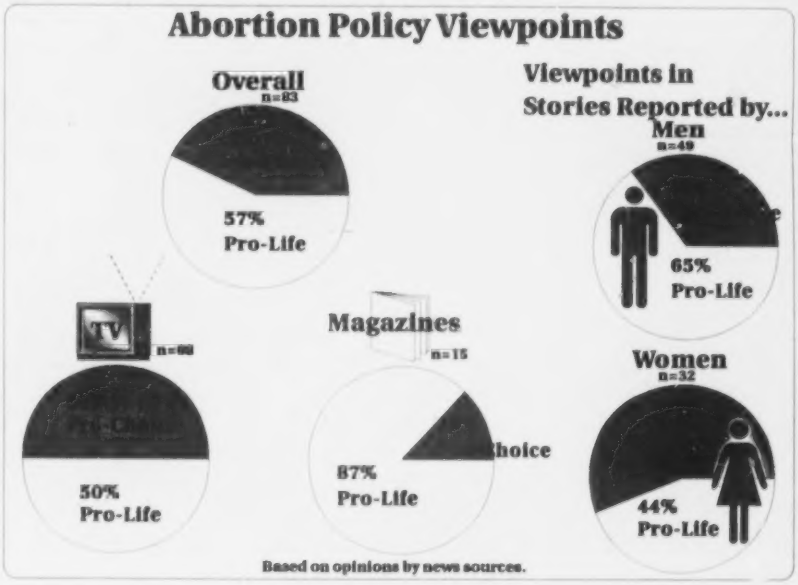
On the questions of the morality of abortion and the status of Roe v. Wade, the advantage went to the pro-life side. All twelve sources commenting on the morality of abortion argued that it was immoral. Randall Terry made this case most strongly in an NBC profile, "...any woman who's contemplating killing their children should not kill their offspring. It's evil, it's immoral, it's murder." (4/23/92) Seven out of eight sources also argued that Roe v. Wade should be overturned. For example, *U.S. News & World Report* cited the Bush administration view that *Roe* "was wrongly decided and should be overruled." (4/27/92)

Finally, on the issue of federal funding to clinics, the debate was much more balanced. Fifty-three percent of sources felt that federal money should not go to clinics, while 47 percent argued that abortion should be accessible to all. (This represents a shift from our 1989 study, in which 70 percent of sources were opposed to federal funding.) Rep. Henry Hyde (R-IL) told Cokie Roberts, "I don't want my tax dollars going to facilitate women exterminating their unborn child." (ABC, 6/26/91) By contrast, Planned Parenthood declared, "Denying a woman that information is setting up a two layered health care system, one set of information for the rich, the other set of information for the poor." (NBC, 11/19/91)

We created a single index of pro-life vs. pro-choice opinion by combining source viewpoints on the questions of abortion rights, morality, Roe's legal status, and government funding. Overall, pro-life opinions were in the majority. Fifty-seven percent of sources held pro-life views on these issues while 43 percent were pro-choice. Most of the debate (68 opinions) occurred on television news, where opinions came out evenly balanced between the two sides. NBC accounted for half of all televised opinions and came closest to striking a balance, with 56 percent of sources expressing pro-life views and 44 percent pro-choice. ABC had the fewest opinions expressed (15) and the only pro-choice tilt (80%), while CBS, with slightly more opinions (19), presented 63 percent pro-life views. In the magazines there was a heavy pro-life tilt, with 13 out of 15 sources favoring the pro-life camp. Two-fifths of all opinions coded in the newsmagazines decried the immorality of abortion.

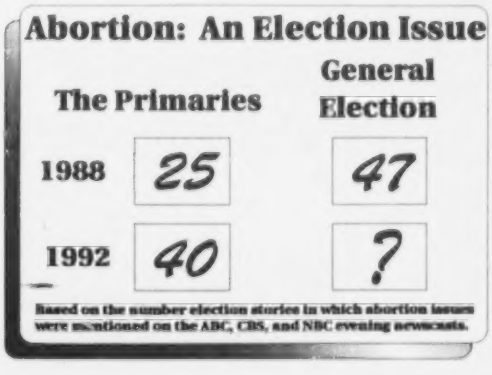
The Gender Gap

The balance between pro-life and pro-choice opinion in abortion stories varied according to the gender of the reporter. (This is not a measure of the opinions of the reporters themselves but rather their selection of sources and quotes.) In stories reported by women, pro-choice opinions dominated by 56 to 44 percent. In stories reported by men, opinions quoted favored the pro-life side by 65 to 35 percent. On television, the gender gap attained perfect symmetry. Male-reported stories cited 56 percent pro-life arguments, while female-reported stories cited 56 percent pro-choice opinions. These numbers are little changed from our 1989 study, in which male reporters on the network news presented pro-life positions 60 percent of the time and female reporters aired the pro-choice views 58 percent of the time.



Voter's Choice

How important will the issue of abortion be in the campaign this fall? According to Mark Phillips of CBS news, "Heading into a political season where it seemed that economic choices would dominate, the decision by the Supreme Court to review the Pennsylvania law has once again dropped the abortion hot potato right in the middle of the presidential campaign." (1/22/92) During the 1988 primaries, abortion was mentioned in campaign stories 25 times. This year the number rose to 40. In the fall of 1988 abortion was an issue in 47 general election stories. Fallout from the Supreme Court's ruling on the Pennsylvania case suggests that the number of abortion stories will rise during the fall campaign this year as well.



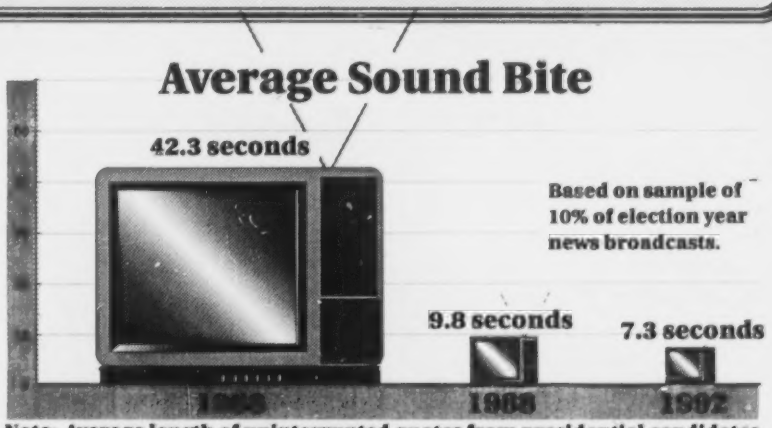
The 1992 Elections - Primary Wrap-Up

Time Out

During the 1992 primary season (1/1 to 6/2) the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news shows broadcast 828 campaign stories totalling 26 hours 11 minutes of airtime. Despite heavy coverage during the campaign's final days (53 stories in the last week alone), coverage still lagged behind 1988 levels, when the networks ran 961 campaign stories worth nearly 29 hours of airtime.

Not only is the campaign getting less time in 1992, but the candidates are getting less time in the election stories that are aired. In 1988, a Harvard University study found that the average "sound bite" from a presidential candidate lasted 9.8 seconds. This year, the average quote lasts only 7.3 seconds, a 25 percent reduction. The average sound bite has declined 83 percent since 1968, when it lasted 43.2 seconds.

President Bush had the longest average sound bite (8.4 seconds), followed by Democratic nominee Bill Clinton (8.1 seconds). Overall, the candidates accounted for only 13 percent of the airtime in campaign stories. Quotes from other sources (such as voters, political experts, etc.) made up 15 percent of airtime. Reporters' own voices occupied the remaining 72 percent of election news airtime.

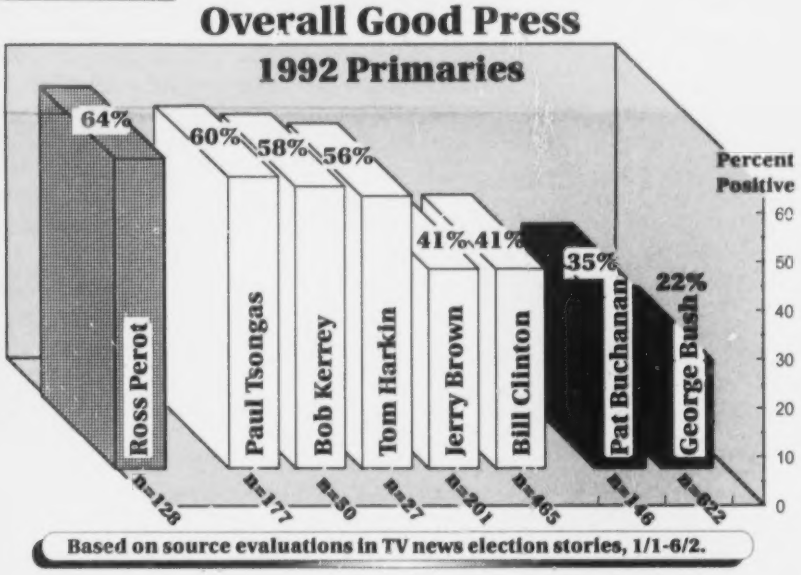


Note: Average length of uninterrupted quotes from presidential candidates.

Bad News Blues

During the primaries, both George Bush and Bill Clinton received far more bad press than good. On-air evaluations of Bush were 78 percent negative in election stories, as he endured 23 straight weeks of predominantly bad press. Clinton fared somewhat better. Beleaguered by questions about his character, he received 59 percent negative evaluations overall. After his New York victory assured him of the Democratic nomination, however, his coverage improved markedly. Prior to the New York primary, Clinton's evaluations were nearly 2 to 1 (64%) negative. After New York, 3 out of 5 (59%) were positive (i.e., only 41% were negative).

Television's treatment of the candidates collectively was decidedly more negative this year than four years ago. During the 1988 primaries, Bush received equal amounts of praise and criticism, and Democrat Michael Dukakis received slightly more good press than bad (54% positive evaluations). (See *Media Monitor*, July 1988) Among the major candidates this year, only Paul Tsongas and Ross Perot received large infusions of positive press. Two early dropouts--Tom Harkin and Bob Kerrey--also received more good press than bad, but neither was the focus of extensive discussion. No candidate came anywhere near Jesse Jackson's 1988 record of 74 percent positive press.



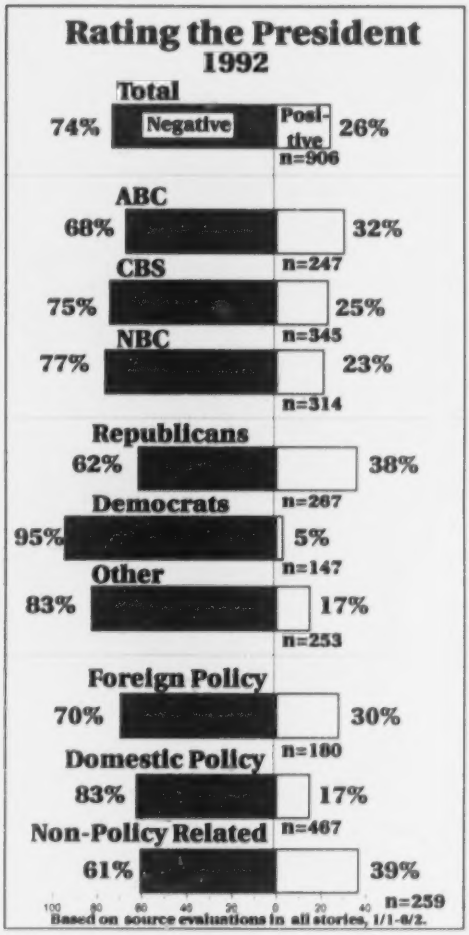
Based on source evaluations in TV news election stories, 1/1-6/2.

Media Monitor

Rating the President

This year, President Bush has faced his most negative press coverage since we began tracking his media image in 1987. While his overall TV news score is slightly more positive than his image in campaign stories alone, Bush still receives three times as much criticism as praise (74% negative press). In comparison, Bush received mainly positive network coverage during his first year in office (55% positive), with more negative coverage in 1990 and 1991 (64% and 61% negative, respectively).

Throughout his presidency, Bush has fared well in news stories about foreign policy issues. This year, his press has been highly negative on foreign and domestic policy alike. The Gulf War was Bush's only bright spot (57% positive), but discussion of that issue was dwarfed by education (80% negative) the economy (84% negative), race relations (85% negative), taxes and the environment (both 88% negative). Overall, Bush's domestic policies were criticized by 83 percent of sources, while his foreign policies were criticized by "only" 70 percent.

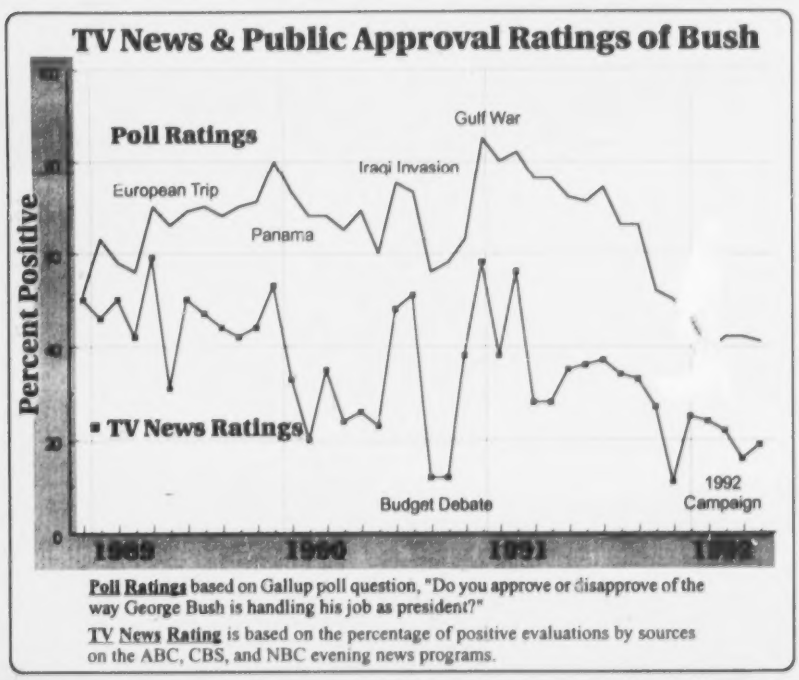


Criticism has outweighed praise even from Republican news sources (62% negative). Critical comments came mostly from Bush's Republican challenger Patrick Buchanan, as well as Republican voters interviewed on why they were abandoning Bush for either Buchanan or Perot. Six out of seven sources with no identified partisanship offered criticism (83% negative), while sources identified as Democrats criticized Bush 95 percent of the time. Typical of this year's tougher coverage was a Washington, D.C. tourist interviewed by NBC: "If I had George Bush in my hands, I would choke the man to death and then I'd body slam him for an hour." (4/16)

Media Momentum

Our long-term tracking shows that the ebb and flow of Bush's public approval rating is directly related to his TV news coverage. Statistically, monthly changes in Bush's good press/bad press ratio are highly correlated (r=.66) with changes in monthly Gallup polls asking people to assess his performance as president. During the past 41 months, Bush's poll ratings have consistently shifted in the direction of his media ratings, especially whenever the coverage was both intensive and one-sided. These shifts in his public approval have followed, not preceded, the shifts in news coverage, suggesting that the news is driving opinion, not catering to the public's views.

Bush's best press has been associated with his foreign policies, notably the 1989 invasion of Panama and the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Bush's best news month came in March 1991, when 77 percent of news sources provided positive evaluations in the wake of the Iraqi surrender. Bush's worst press has been linked to domestic policy, especially the October 1990 budget summit (when he received 94% negative press), and this winter's coverage of the economic recession. Since October 1991, Bush's evaluations on the evening news have ranged from 67 percent to 89 percent negative. During that same time period, his Gallup approval rating has dropped 25 points, to just 41 percent public approval in late May.



Poll Ratings based on Gallup poll question, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush is handling his job as president?"

TV News Rating is based on the percentage of positive evaluations by sources on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news programs.

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Battle of the Sound Bites

TV News Coverage of the 1992 Presidential Election Campaign

How is TV news covering the race for the presidency? Has the coverage changed since the primaries ended? And how does this year's coverage compare to 1988? This month's *Media Monitor* examines the 1,559 election stories that appeared on the network evening news shows from January 1 through August 21, when the Republican National Convention ended. We also compare current campaign coverage with results from our previous study of the 1988 election. Finally, this issue tracks campaign jokes from late-night talk show hosts Jay Leno, David Letterman, and Arsenio Hall.

Major findings:

■ **Same Old Story** The amount of TV news election coverage is almost exactly the same as in 1988. *Page 2*

■ **Policy Over Polls** Policy issues have received more coverage this year than the campaign horse race. *Page 2*

■ **Dems Over GOP** Clinton and Gore are getting better press than Bush and Quayle. Unlike 1988, Democrats also fared better than Republicans during the primaries. *Page 3,5*

■ **No Views Is Good Views** Both nominees got mostly bad press for their views on policy issues. *Page 4*

■ **Conventional Wisdom** 1992 convention coverage favored Clinton over Bush; in 1988 it favored Bush over Dukakis. *Page 5*

■ **Campaign Comedy** Late night comedians have aimed nearly three times as many jokes at the Republicans as the Democrats. *Page 6*

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Road to the White House

From January 1 through the end of the Republican National Convention on August 21, the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news shows broadcast 1,559 stories on the presidential campaign, with a total airtime of 49 hours 16 minutes. At this point in 1988, the three networks had aired nearly identical totals of 1,543 stories and 49 hours 44 minutes of airtime. NBC has provided the most coverage this year, with 529 stories totalling 17 hours 29 minutes of airtime followed by ABC (527 stories, 15 hours 40 minutes), and CBS (503 stories, 16 hours 7 minutes).

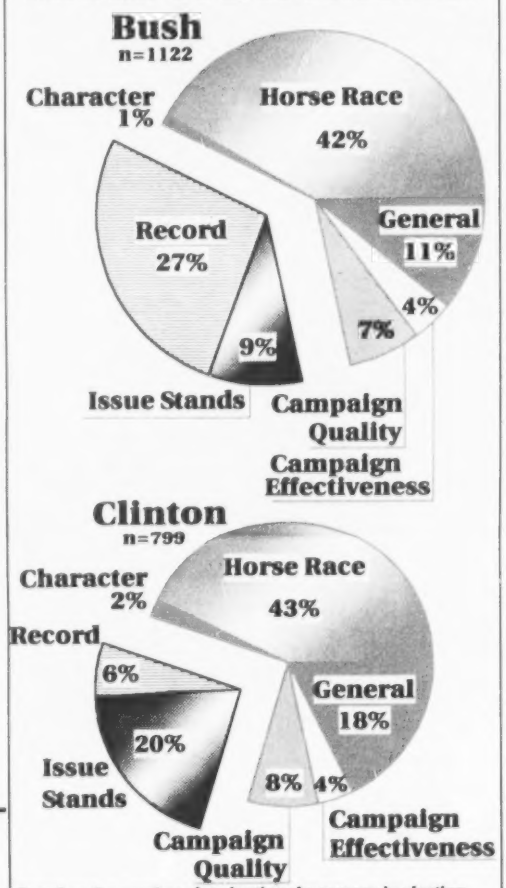
Although the amount of coverage has remained constant, its focus has changed since 1988. At this point four years ago, the "**horse race**" - the standings and prospects of the presidential candidates - was the single most heavily covered topic. This year the horse race ranks fourth, and **policy issues** have received the most attention of any aspect of the campaign. TV news discussion of policy issues is up by 66 percent from 1988 (544 stories compared to 327). Major contributors to this increase include the nation's economic troubles and the discussion of urban problems and race relations that followed the Los Angeles riots. Two other old reliables of election coverage, **campaign strategy** and **campaign trail controversies** (scandals, gaffes, etc.), are receiving roughly the same levels of attention this year as in 1988.

Campaign '92 Topics

	Primary (1/1-6/2) stories	Post-Primary (6/3-8/21) stories	Total stories
Policy Issues	266	278	544
Campaign Strategy	260	260	520
Campaign Controversies	270	203	473
Horse Race Standings	270	103	373

Note: stories may have more than one topic.

Areas of Discussion



Based on the number of evaluations by sources in election stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts (6/3-8/21).

Rating the Players

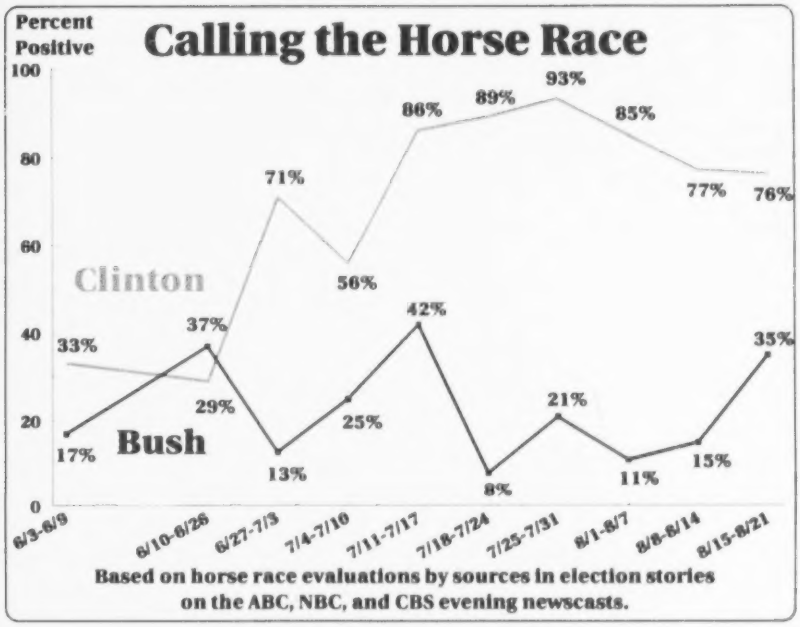
Since January, we have tabulated 2,852 statements by sources or reporters that either praised or criticized candidates for national office. The virtues and vices that were evaluated most often included a candidate's record in office, his positions on policy issues, personal character, effectiveness on the campaign trail, and the appropriateness or ethical quality of his campaign. In addition to these evaluations of each candidate's desirability, we have logged an even greater number of statements (3,268) that rated their viability - their standing or prospects in the campaign horse race.

Since the primaries ended, 1,921 sources have evaluated the two major party nominees along these dimensions. Horse race assessments accounted for just over two-fifths (42%) of these judgments. When the discussion turned from the candidates' chances to their merits, the focus of debate was split about evenly between their positions or records on public policy matters, and non-policy related subjects, such as their campaign behavior or personal character.

As the incumbent, Bush's policies were most often rated in terms of his Administration's performance, rather than his public statements. In contrast to Bush, Clinton's media profile was shaped more by his proposals and positions than his record in public office. But, a smaller proportion of Clinton's coverage has been substantively oriented. Character assessments made up only two percent of Clinton's media profile since June, down from eight percent during the primaries.

Calling the Race

Horse race evaluations include assessments of poll results, campaign organization and fund-raising, crowd response, interest group support, etc. Since late June these reports have been far kinder toward Clinton than Bush. During the first three weeks after the primaries ended, Clinton's horse race notices were 69 percent negative. Since then, they have been 83 percent positive. The perception



Based on horse race evaluations by sources in election stories on the ABC, NBC, and CBS evening newscasts.

that he had enjoyed a successful convention, coupled with his upward movement in the polls, triggered a wave of positive horse race evaluations for Clinton. On the Democrats' post-convention bus tour, for example, Richard Threlkeld described the crowds as "big, vocal, and enthusiastic" (CBS 7/18), while Garrick Utley said Clinton was "on a roll" (NBC 7/18). Clinton's rise served to spotlight how far Bush had fallen. Even during the week of the Republican convention, nearly two out of three assessments of Bush's prospects were negative, while three out of four judgments of Clinton's chances continued to be positive.

Campaign Face-Off

Apart from assessments of the horse race, the tone of TV news coverage has been mainly negative toward both camps. During the primaries Clinton and Bush each received more negative coverage than their opponents. Clinton's media image has improved recently, while Bush continues to get mainly negative notices. Since June, evaluations of Bush have run three to two negative, while assessments of Clinton have been evenly balanced. The gap between their running mates is far greater. Three out of four sources have praised Al Gore, while two out of three have criticized Dan Quayle. Conversely, Barbara Bush has been applauded by nine out of ten sources, while three out of four have panned Hillary Clinton's performance. (Evaluations of the nominees' wives are relatively rare, however - only 43 since the primaries ended.)

George Bush has received his lowest marks for the quality of his campaign. Four out of five sources (82%) criticized the president for running a misleading or negative campaign, or for avoiding important issues. After Bush's convention speech, for example, Clinton called him "a great fearmonger," and CBS convention analyst Joe Klein seconded Clinton, reporting that the speech contained major "untruths" about taxes. (CBS, 8/21)

Bush also scored low when the talk turned to his record as president. Sixty-two percent of

Rating the Rivals

Percent Positive

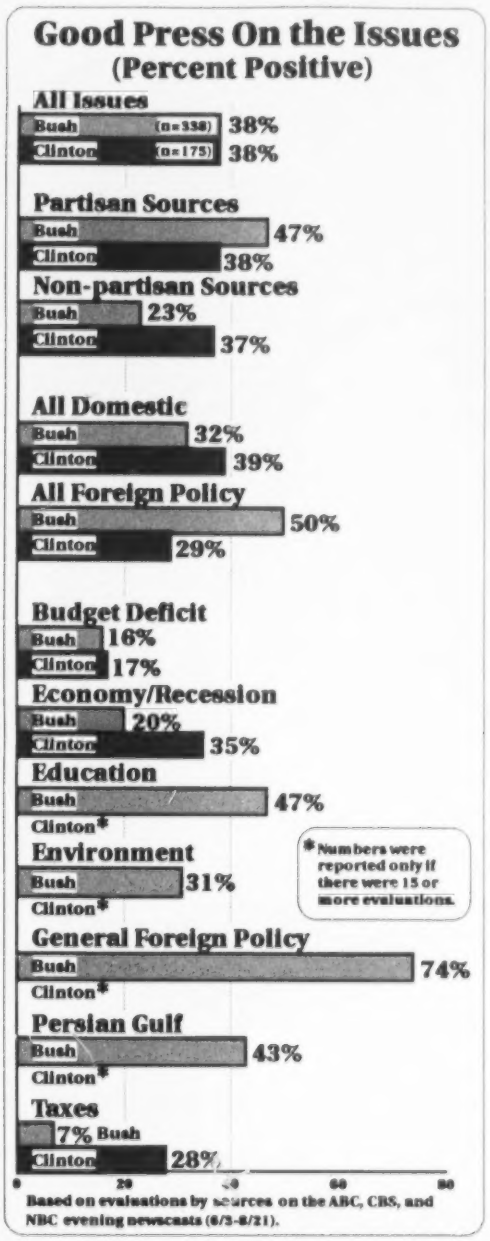
(6/3-8/21)

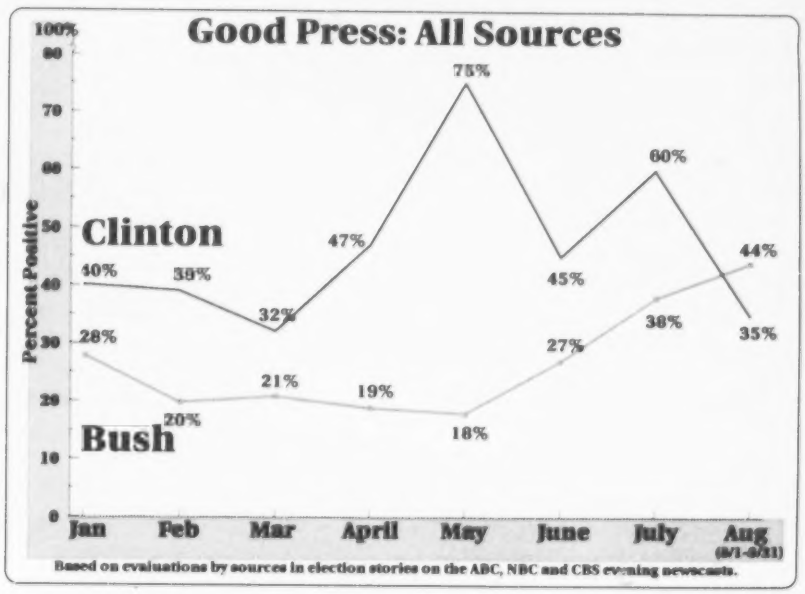
Clinton		Bush	
Overall Campaign (n=346)	50%	Overall Campaign (n=792)	41%
Bill Clinton	49%	George Bush	40%
Hillary Clinton	22%	Barbara Bush	90%
Al Gore	79%	Dan Quayle	28%
Campaign Staff	47%	Campaign Staff	31%
Evaluations of Clinton by Topic:		**Evaluations of Bush by Topic:**	
Character	13%	Character	--
Job Performance	61%	Job Performance	38%
Campaign Quality	34%	Campaign Quality	18%
Campaign Effectiveness	77%	Campaign Effectiveness	61%
Issue Positions	35%	Issue Positions	38%
General Evaluations	65%	General Evaluations	50%
Evaluations of Clinton by Source:		**Evaluations of Bush by Source:**	
Republicans	9%	Republicans	80%
Democrats	81%	Democrats	9%
Non-partisans	53%	Non-partisans	29%

Based on evaluations by sources in election stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts for categories receiving 15 or more evaluations.

sources criticized Bush's record, mainly on matters of domestic policy. For example, an economist complained on ABC that, "He [Bush] has articulated no vision of where this country should go in an economic sense." (ABC, 8/17) A voter interviewed on NBC was equally critical: "He's not done anything, he don't (sic) stand for anything." (NBC, 8/17)

Bush and Clinton have both taken flak for their issue positions. Bush rated best when the subject was foreign policy (50% positive compared to Clinton's 29% positive). Clinton received slightly more positive press on domestic issues (39% positive compared to 32% positive for Bush). But the domestic policy debate has consistently revolved around President Bush, his approach, and his record. On major issues such as education and the environment, the networks have provided almost no debate over Clinton's record or proposals. However, both Clinton and Bush received heavily negative coverage on their economic proposals. For example, one budget expert dismissed Clinton's economic plan: " ... if the vice president is criticized because he can't spell, the Clinton campaign can't do its arithmetic." (CBS, 7/29)

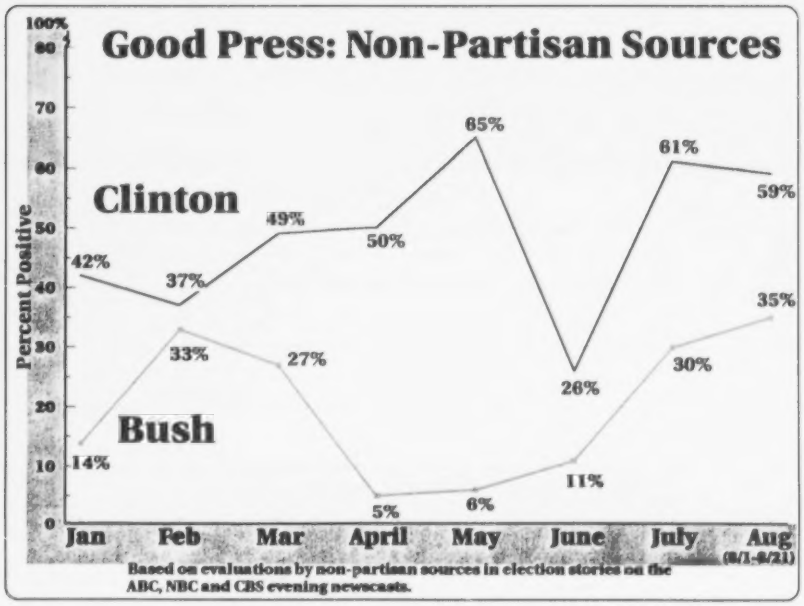




As Time Goes By

George Bush has received lower marks on television news than any other presidential candidate during seven of the last eight months. During the primaries, Bush was criticized by 78 percent of news sources. Since then, his coverage has improved only slightly, to 60 percent negative assessments. The single exception has been the month of August, when Bush's reviews rose to 44 percent positive, while Clinton sank to just 35 percent positive, his lowest rating since March.

Bush's rise coincided with the Republican convention, a period when the nominee's party



traditionally dominates the news coverage. Thus, Republicans provided the lion's share of the sources praising Bush and panning Clinton during August. Among non-partisan sources (such as voters, pundits, and reporters), Clinton's good press margin over Bush remained as wide as ever during August (59% positive for Clinton, 35% positive for Bush).

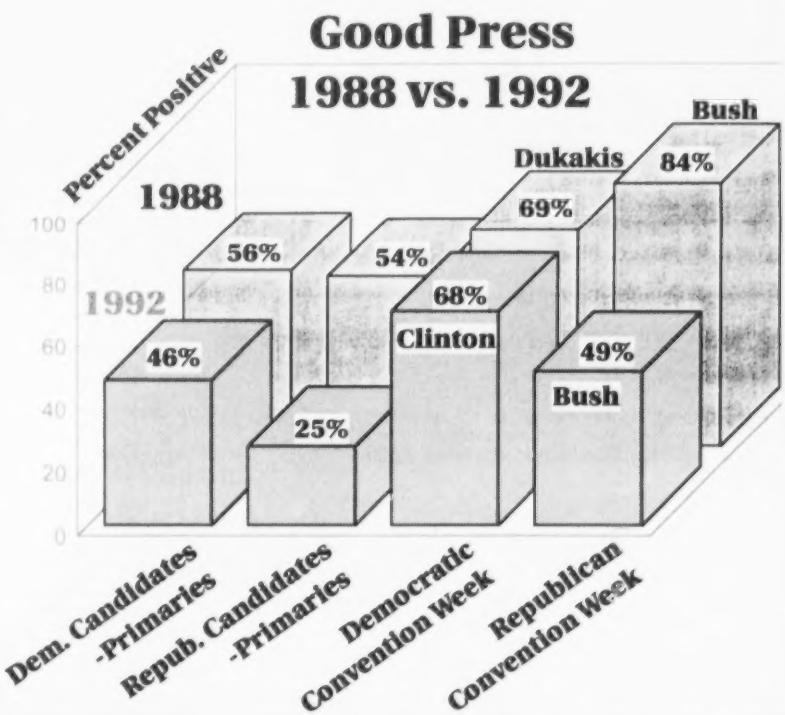
The same pattern held true throughout the entire post-primary period. Among all sources, Clinton's 49 percent positive press bested Bush's 40 percent positive score. When Democratic and Republican sources were removed from the mix, Clinton's evaluations improved to 53 percent positive, while Bush's dropped to 29 percent positive. When ratings of Gore and Quayle were added, the Democratic ticket boasted a two-to-one advantage over their Republican counterparts, by 58 percent to 29 percent good press.

That Was Then ...

So far this year, the tone of TV news election coverage has favored the Democrats over their Republican opponents. But these results are notably different from the pattern of coverage four years ago. After the 1988 primaries, we compared TV news evaluations of all Democratic presidential candidates to the field of Republican contenders, and found that **as groups** the two sides received roughly balanced treatment (56% positive press for the Democrats, 54% positive for the Republicans). During the 1992 primaries, by contrast, Republicans faced criticism from three out of every four sources (25% positive evaluations), while Democratic contenders received roughly balanced press (46% positive).

There was a similar change since 1988 in network portrayals of the two nominating conventions. Bill Clinton garnered 68 percent positive evaluations during the week of his party's convention in New York City. That showing was nearly identical to the 69 percent positive coverage that Michael Dukakis received during his convention in July, 1988. A month later, George Bush's own 84 percent positive convention press actually bested Dukakis' showing. During the Houston convention this August, however, Bush received only 49 percent positive coverage.

Will television's treatment of the two contenders even out after the traditional Labor Day kickoff of the general election campaign? The next two issues of *Media Monitor* will track the final phase of Campaign '92.



Campaign Comedy

Although the Democrats lead the campaign horse race, the Republicans lead the humor race. Since the primaries ended, the Republican presidential ticket has been joked about almost three times as often as the Democrats by comedians on late-night television. Not only is George Bush well in the lead as the most joked about individual in 1992, but Dan Quayle is also outdistancing Bill Clinton, with Senator Al Gore so far failing to register more than a blip on the joke meter.

Bush

Hurricane Andrew is causing death and destruction in Florida. Today President Bush blamed the Democratic Congress. --Leno, 8/25

Do you know the main difference between Elvis and Bush's economic plan? Some people claim they've actually seen Elvis. --Arsenio, 8/21

Bush is being accused of manufacturing a crisis with Iraq. If true, it's the first manufacturing job he's brought to America in years. --Leno, 8/02

If Bush wants to destroy Iraq he should run for President of **that** country. --Leno, 8/28

Bush says he will only put his political commercials on programs that reflect his agenda. He can advertise his economic plan on "Rescue 911," he can go after Clinton on "A Current Affair," and he can explain why he chose Quayle on "Unsolved Mysteries."--Leno, 8/11

Quayle

George Bush is as smart and caring as the next guy, especially since the next guy is Dan Quayle. --Leno, 8/19

There are rumors going around Washington that the government will attack Iraq and dump Quayle. Why don't we dump Iraq and attack Quayle? --Leno, 7/24

Bush said that he definitely will not dump Quayle. On the bright side, he's lied to us before. --Letterman, 7/23

Campaign Humor
(June - August)

	Number of Jokes
George Bush	**213**
Dan Quayle	**137**
Bill Clinton	**130**
Al Gore	**6**
Barbara Bush	**4**
Tipper Gore	**4**
Hillary Clinton	**2**
Marilyn Quayle	**0**

Based on the number of jokes from the monologues of Jay Leno, David Letterman, and Arsenio Hall.

The Republicans attack Clinton for the 38 percent illiteracy rate in America. Big deal, there's a 50 percent illiteracy rate on the Republican ticket. --Arsenio, 8/19

Quayle is excited about the prospect of being president. It means that at the next state dinner he wouldn't have to sit at the little card table. --Arsenio, 8/17

Clinton

Bill Clinton recently spoke at the American Legion. I guess Jane Fonda wasn't available. --Leno, 8/25

Clinton said he's capable of being Commander in Chief because he has called out the Arkansas national guard. Isn't that like saying you can fly the space shuttle because you've seen every episode of "Star Trek"? --Leno, 8/31

Clinton is a religious man. He says he would endorse nine out of the ten commandments. --Leno, 8/26

There are tapes of Princess Di talking to a boyfriend, and it's a pretty explicit conversation. And Bill Clinton thought he had that all behind him. --Leno, 8/26

Automakers in Detroit say the Clinton-Gore ticket demands too much of them. They can't get the gas mileage Gore wants and the big backseat Clinton wants in the same car. --Leno, 8/28

"Twofers"

Every time President Bush denies that he's had an affair, Bill Clinton gets a royalty. --Letterman, 8/13

The premier of Yugoslavia says that if the West intervenes there, it will look like another Vietnam. I guess that rules out Clinton and Quayle going there. --Leno, 8/11

Note: The wording of some jokes has been altered slightly for brevity.

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The Boom in Gloom

TV News Coverage of the American Economy 1990-1992

The economy -- its health and prospects -- has been the number one domestic news topic during the past two years. This month *Media Monitor* charts the course of TV news economic coverage from October 1990 through September 1992. The study covers 2,531 stories and 63 hours 36 minutes of airtime on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts. This issue also updates our continuing analysis of TV election news through the first month of the fall presidential campaign.

Major findings:

■ **Big News** The amount of economic news doubled during the past year; unemployment was the top story for eleven straight months. *Page 1*

■ **Bad News** Since July, 96 percent of economic evaluations and 83 percent of predictions have been negative. *Page 2,3*

■ **ABC Is Bullish** A majority of ABC sources gave optimistic forecasts; on CBS and NBC, two out of three sources were pessimistic. *Page 3*

■ **Economists Vote "No"** Most economists criticized both George Bush's and Bill Clinton's economic policies. *Page 6*

Election Update

■ **Republicans Get More News...** In September the Republicans got nearly twice as much airtime as the Democrats. *Page 5*

■ **...But Enjoy It Less** Clinton/Gore continued to get better press than Bush/Quayle. *Page 5*

■ **CBS vs GOP** The coverage was most balanced on ABC and most one-sided on CBS. *Page 6*

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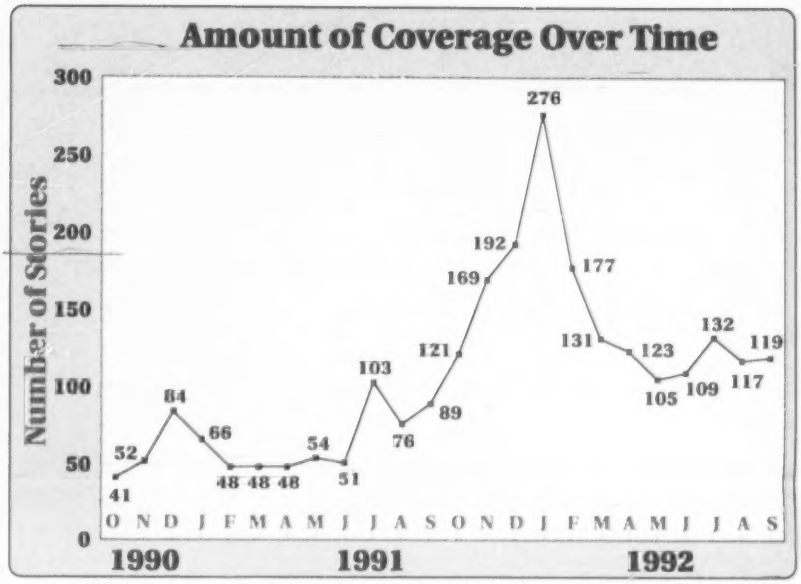
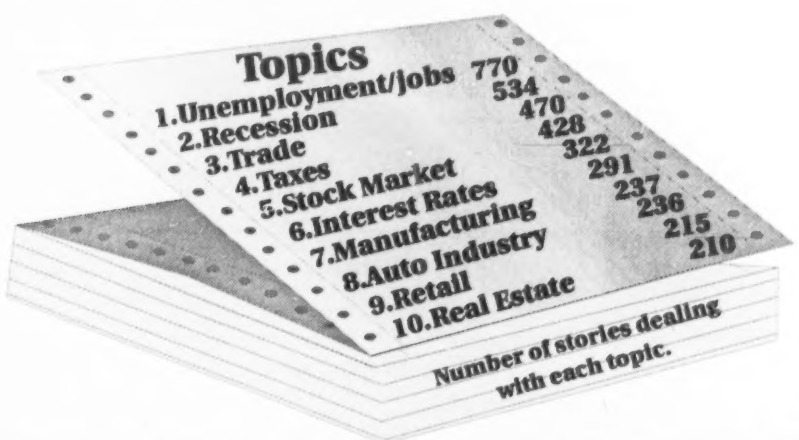
The economy has been the top domestic story on TV news every year since CMPA began tracking the news agenda in 1989. Only the Gulf War and the revolutionary changes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have attracted more coverage. This in-depth analysis of economic news covers the two year period from October 1990 through September 1992. During that time the ABC, CBS, and NBC nightly newscasts have devoted 2,531 stories totalling 63 hours 36 minutes of airtime to the economy. NBC led the pack with 26 hours 11 minutes of airtime, about 40 percent more than either CBS (18 hours 52 minutes) or ABC (18 hours 33 minutes). Economic coverage more than doubled during the second year of the study, with the monthly average jumping from 63 to 148 stories. The coverage peaked at 276 stories in January 1992, driven by the president's Asian trade trip, the New Hampshire primary, and analysis of the holiday shopping season.



Money Matters

The most frequent topic of economic news was unemployment and related job concerns. This subject alone generated 770 stories, over 200 more than any other. Unemployment was the most newsworthy economic topic for eleven straight months from October 1991 through August 1992, before being edged out by trade issues in September. Attention focused on the plight of job seekers, unemployment insurance claims, and corporate restructuring.

The second most visible issue was the recession itself, which appeared in 534 stories. The coverage was boosted during 1991 by controversy over whether we were in a recession, and by the 1992 election debate over economic stagnation. The 470 trade-related stories included Bush's trip to Asia in January 1992, the free trade agreement with Mexico, and discussions of our trade status with China. Taxes (428 stories) were frequently mentioned in election coverage, including both Democratic criticism of Bush's broken tax pledge and Republican criticism that Clinton would raise taxes. The gyrations of the stock market (322 stories) attracted attention throughout the study, and falling interest rates also made news regularly (291). Rounding out the top ten were the four most newsworthy industrial sectors - manufacturing (237 stories), automobiles (236), retailers (215), and real estate (210).



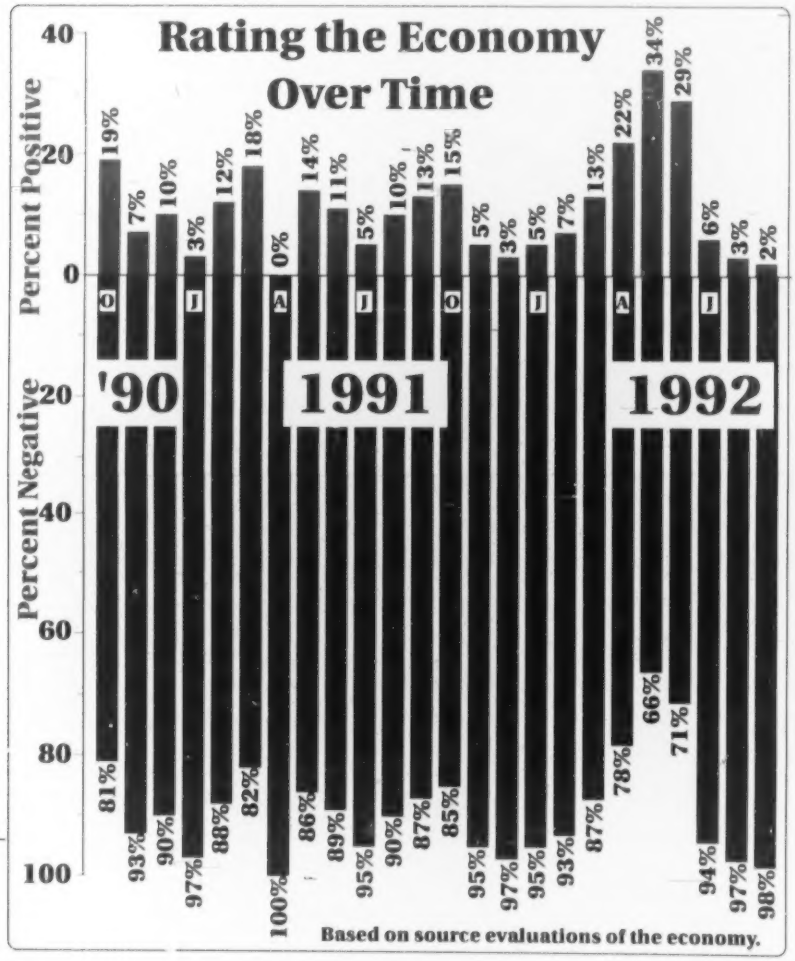
Selling Short

Evaluations of America's economic condition were consistently negative. Of the

1815 assessments of the overall economy and its major sectors, 91 percent were negative. For example, a union worker told CBS, "We're in a depression. We're not in a recession. There's no work. There's no jobs." (4/5/91) During the most recent quarter (July-September) 96 percent of sources have focused on economic weaknesses and shortcomings; only six out of 145 sources have offered positive assessments of America's economic performance. Thus, economist Allan Sinai recently concluded, "We'll be lucky if we can keep our head above water." (CBS, 8/4/92)

Assessments of the national economy have been the most negative of all, with 94 percent of sources expressing pessimistic views. Evaluations of particular industries and economic sectors were only slightly more positive. At least nine out of ten sources turned thumbs down on the performance of the banking industry (94% negative), the auto makers (92%), and the transportation sector (90%). Retailers, real estate, and the construction and aerospace industries were also frequently targeted for lackluster performance. The best ratings -- "only" 67 percent negative -- went to the manufacturing sector.

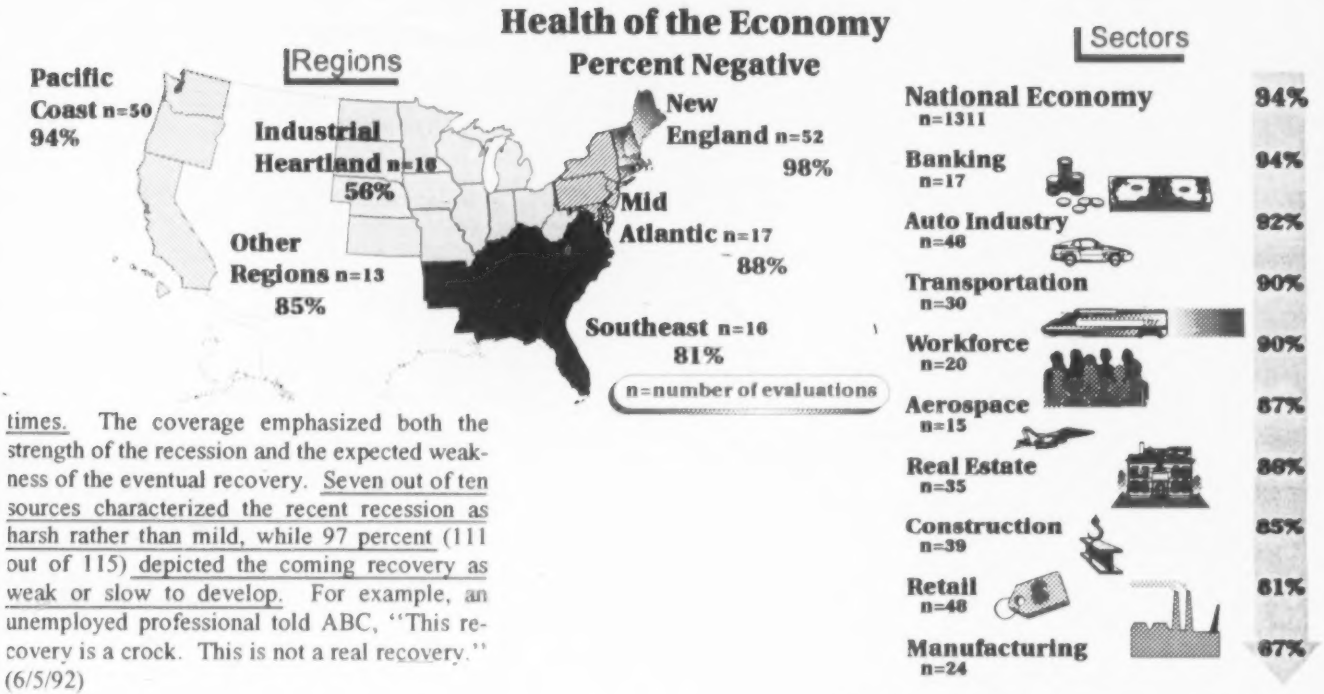
Portrayals of geographic regions were equally downbeat, with the greatest attention devoted to the most depressed areas. New England and the Pacific coast attracted more comment than all other regions combined, and assessments of these two areas were 96 percent negative. Only the industrial heartland (the north central and midwestern states) attracted more than an occasional favorable comment (44% positive), reflecting the relatively favorable assessments of manufacturing industries based in that region.



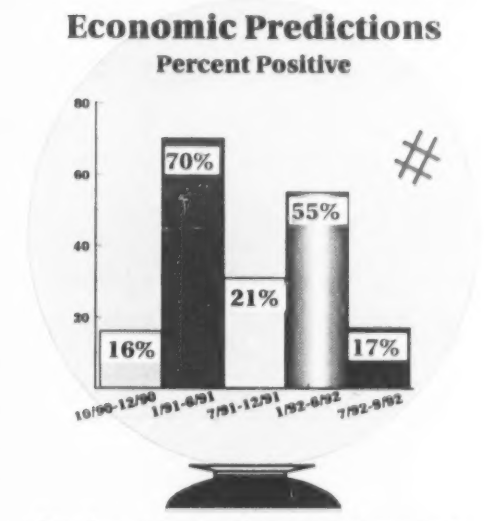
Previews

Three out of five sources (60%) foresaw more hard times ahead. For example, economist Philip Braverman called the outlook "pessimistic for jobs, and for income, and for the economy." (CBS 9/26/91) Nonetheless, assessments of America's economic future were both more positive and more variable than those of the present. Among the "yeasayers" was Paul Volker: "the United States economy is going to look better...be more productive, more efficient." (NBC 6/25/92) Predictions veered sharply back and forth over time, with the greatest optimism expressed early in 1991 and the greatest pessimism late in 1990 (in anticipation of a mideast war) and again in recent months. Since July five out of every six sources have expressed anxiety over future economic developments. This aspect of the coverage also produced the only major difference among the networks. A majority (53%) of sources on ABC expressed optimism about future developments, while 61 percent of sources on NBC and 69 percent on CBS were pessimistic.

The downbeat aura of economic news extended to descriptions of the recession and predictions of recovery. During the eighteen months since we began noting these aspects of the coverage, reporters mentioned the word recession 663



times. The coverage emphasized both the strength of the recession and the expected weakness of the eventual recovery. Seven out of ten sources characterized the recent recession as harsh rather than mild, while 97 percent (111 out of 115) depicted the coming recovery as weak or slow to develop. For example, an unemployed professional told ABC, "This recovery is a crock. This is not a real recovery." (6/5/92)



Based on evaluations by sources in economic stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts.

Main Features

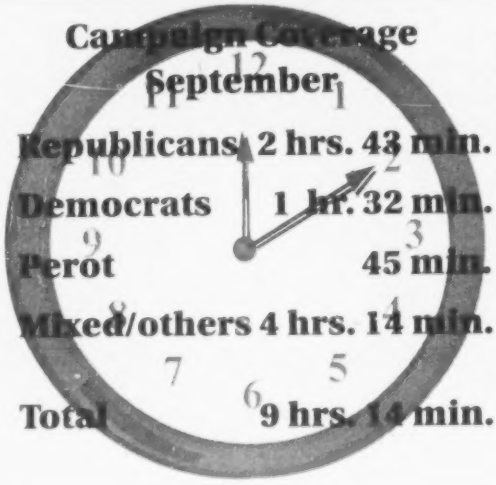
The networks personalized economic news in 396 features about the economic fortunes of companies, families, and individuals. These anecdotal presentations were often contained in the networks' special segments, such as ABC's "American Agenda," CBS's "The Money Crunch," and NBC's "Daily Difference." Overall, three out of five features (61%) were negative in tone. But this masks a sharp distinction between features about business, which were somewhat positive, and those about individuals, which were highly negative.

A majority (56%) of anecdotal treatments of business were success stories, often describing how individual companies were bucking a downward trend. For example, on April 15 NBC profiled an exercise in what Tom Brokaw called "workplace democracy." Reporter Mike Jensen described a company called Nucor, where "bosses and workers are treated the same" and "everyone's pay depends how much steel is produced." He concluded, "in more than twenty years, Nucor never has laid off a single employee or closed a single plant for lack of work."

In contrast, 69 percent of the individuals and families who were profiled were victims of hard times. By far the most frequent theme of these anecdotes was the plight of the unemployed. For example, in January CBS profiled Marie and Bob Mulligan, an unemployed New Hampshire couple. On April 24 Richard Threlkeld returned to find that, "the Mulligan's are **still** out of work." A tearful Marie then asked, "Can Mr. Bush honestly say that he knows how we feel? He can't."

Election Update - The Fall Campaign

As campaign '92 moved into its final phase, the networks picked up the pace. In September the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news shows broadcast 285 stories on the presidential election, with a total airtime of nine hours, 14 minutes -- nearly one-third of the entire monthly newshole. ABC led the pack with 120 stories and 212 minutes of coverage, well ahead of both NBC (80 stories, 173 minutes) and CBS (85 stories, 168 minutes). The Republicans attracted nearly twice as much coverage as the Democrats - two hours 43 minutes of airtime vs. one hour 32 minutes. Temporary non-candidate Ross Perot received half as much airtime (45 minutes) as the Clinton/Gore ticket. Throughout the first nine months of 1992, the nightly newscasts have devoted 1,805 stories and 58 hours, 29 minutes of airtime to the presidential election.



September Songs

The greatest media attention in September (126 stories) went to campaign trail controversies. These short-term flare-ups included disputes over Clinton's draft record, Perot's on-again, off-again candidacy, Bush's veracity on his Iran-contra role, and the Republicans' allegedly low-road campaign tactics. Policy issues finished a close second, with 117 stories. The issue coverage reflected TV's more general emphasis on economic news. The top election issue in September was the state of the economy (41 stories), followed by the candidates' policies on taxes (34), the budget deficit (17) and unemployment (12). The only non-economic issues to make the top five were the health care crisis and the family values debate (12 stories apiece). Attention to matters of substance thus exceeded coverage of campaign strategy and tactics (91 stories) and the candidates' popularity and prospects (75).

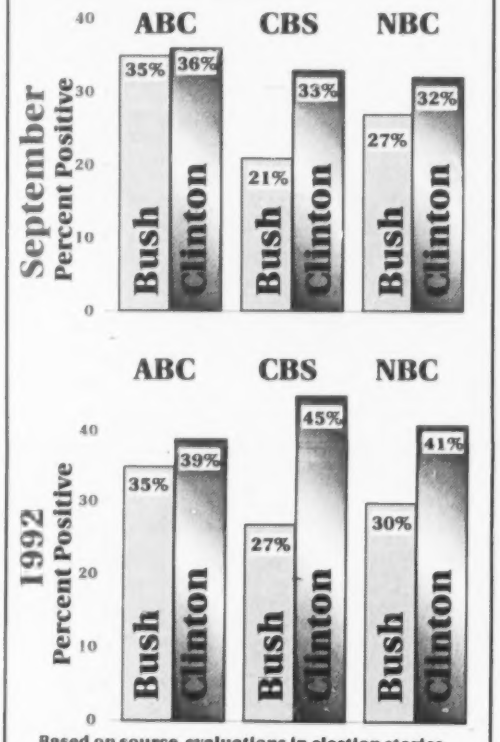
Topics-September

Campaign Controversies	126
Policy Issues	117
Campaign Strategy	91
Horse Race Standings	75
Debates	38
Voters	37

1. Economy	41
2. Taxes	34
3. Deficit	17
4. Jobs	12
4. Health Care	12
4. Family Values	12

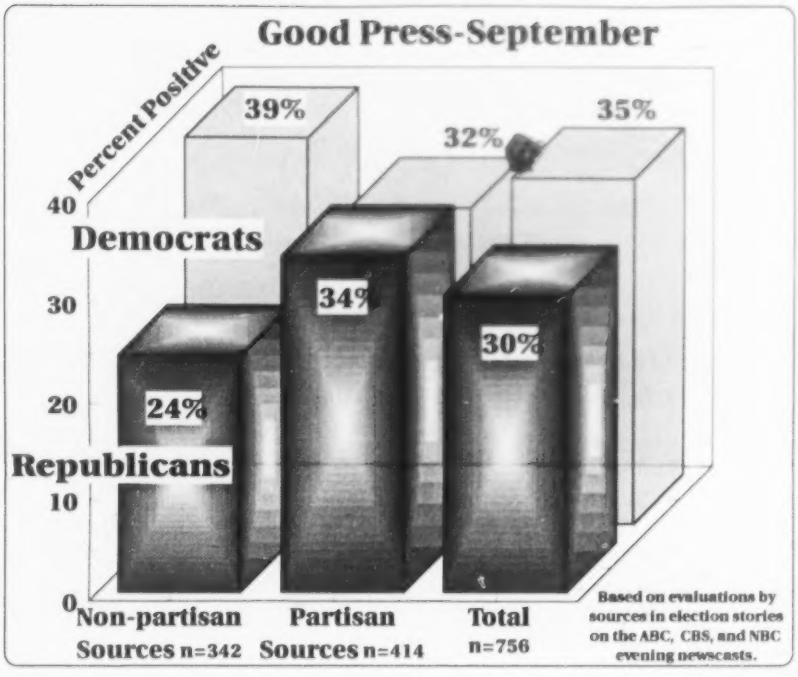
Note: Stories may cover more than one topic and issue.

Good Press By Network



Based on source evaluations in election stories.

However, these two aspects of the horse race together outnumbered stories on policy issues. Negotiations over the presidential debates (38 stories) and profiles of the electorate (37) rounded out the month's leading topics.



Rating the Rivals

The Republican ticket continued to receive worse press than their Democratic challengers, although most evaluations of both sides were negative. Sources from the two parties traded charges over the airwaves in about equal measure. The GOP disadvantage occurred among non-partisan sources such as voters, pundits, and reporters. Three out of four non-partisan sources (76%) turned thumbs down on Bush and Quayle, compared to three out of five (61%) who criticized Clinton and Gore. For example, one voter told CBS, "I will not trust my future and my child's future to someone who has done such a poor job for the past four years." (9/18) The same pattern appeared in September 1988, when Bush/Quayle and Dukakis/Bentson received about equal treatment from partisan sources, but the Democrats fared better among non-partisans. That year, however, evaluations of the two tickets evened out by election day. Continuing a year-long pattern, the networks differed in their treatment of the presidential contenders. The coverage has been most balanced on ABC and most critical toward Bush on CBS. On all three networks, however, the coverage became more balanced in September.

No Sale

Since the primaries ended, both candidates have drawn mostly criticism for their economic policies, though Bush has fared worse than Clinton (23% vs. 32% positive assessments). Once again, the difference was concentrated among non-partisan sources. Their judgments on economic issues were 38 percent positive toward Clinton, compared to 15 percent positive toward Bush. Economists split two-to-one against Clinton's policies but five-to-one against Bush's. For example, MIT's Lester Thurow concluded, "Bill Clinton is closest to the truth." (ABC, 9/20) Bush fared especially badly on the issues of job creation and economic growth. For example, economist David Wyss argued, "George Bush has been there four years; he should have had an economic plan by now...if you're worried about your job...vote for Bill Clinton." (ABC, 9/20).

Rating Economic Policies
Percent Positive
(6/3-9/30)

	Bush	Clinton
Total	23%	32%
By Source		
Partisan	27%	29%
Non-Partisan	15%	38%
Economists	17%	31%
By Issue		
Growth	18%	46%
Jobs	28%	50%
Budget	26%	15%
Taxes	18%	22%
	n=741	n=608

Ratings based on evaluations by sources in election stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening newscasts.